



COMBAT

Arctic Circle 1942–44

Gebirgsjäger **VERSUS** Soviet Sailor

David Greentree



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Introduction

The Laplanders describe how God made the world and from what remained he then made the northern Arctic. The area was and is one of the most desolate in the world and in 1941, Generalleutnant (later Generaloberst) Eduard Dietl, the commander of German forces in the region, stated that it was not supportive of military operations. Petsamo, near the Barents coast and 320km north of the Arctic Circle, was the main settlement and was ceded to the Soviet Union by Finland following the Winter War (1939–40). Here, during the brief summer when for 50 days the mean temperature was over 10°C, the Gulf Stream permitted lush summer vegetation with some trees and bushes; further east vegetation was sparse, however, and boulder-strewn hills and lakes abounded. The winter extended from October to May and although the temperature was milder than in southern Lapland, the low was still -25°C. Even so, Hitler – who above all others stressed the economic imperatives of grand strategy – was adamant that a ground offensive to capture Murmansk and/or sever the railway line to the south should be attempted in order to stop

A 30m rope was carried by *Gebirgsjäger* and three men could be attached as necessary. Cliffs would be scaled to gain a tactical advantage and enable an attack from a seemingly impassable direction. Belaying (when the rope was secured around a secure point) was taught in order to limit the distance a man might fall if he lost his footing. The ice axe was used as a support for walking and could also be used as a good belay, particularly on ice and snow. Here, a German postcard shows the specialist equipment the *Gebirgsjäger* carried. (Author's Collection)





For the Soviet forces, transport to the shore by fast motor torpedo boats was common. As there were no specialized assault landing craft or ships, minor assault units were invariably landed at night and forward detachments of a major assault were ashore by dawn. Various vessels were used and their different speeds and capabilities could hamper coordination. During the landing of the 12th Naval Infantry Brigade in the early hours of 28 April 1942, small warships were employed, including 42 patrol boats and minesweepers, one destroyer and two escorts. (Photo by: Sovfoto/UiG via Getty Images)

military supplies reaching the Soviet Union from Britain by sea. Murmansk, an ice-free port capable of receiving Allied aid throughout the year, was only 90km from the Finnish border and seemingly vulnerable.

The soldiers sent on this mission would be those who had made such an impact during the invasion of Norway in early 1940 – specialist mountain troops called *Gebirgsjäger*. Mountain divisions were better able than infantry divisions to cope with the challenges the region presented because the *Gebirgsjäger* were not reliant on motor vehicles, which had limited value in the region because of the lack of roads; instead, the mountain specialists had plenty of pack mules and horses that could transport specially designed guns and equipment. Moreover, because their training emphasized operating in harsh climates, the *Gebirgsjäger* were more likely to possess the physical and mental toughness required to cope with such an unforgiving environment.

Certain Soviet troops that opposed them in the northern Arctic had similar qualities. In all sectors of the front where ports and naval bases existed – the Baltic, Black and Barents seas – the Soviet Navy organized a variety of units from naval personnel to fight alongside the Red Army. In total, 389,975 sailors would serve on land, and not only on the coast but also in the interior.

By the end of 1941, the majority of sailors that would fight as ground forces were organized in either *Morskaya Pekhota* (naval infantry) or *Morskaya Strelkovaya* (naval rifle) brigades. The main difference

lay in the purpose of these formations. While naval infantry brigades were intended primarily for combat operations in maritime sectors, mainly in amphibious assault operations, naval rifle brigades were created for combat on the land front. The purpose of these formations also predetermined differences in their manning. Naval infantry brigades were composed only of seamen, while in naval rifle brigades the proportion of seamen did not exceed 50–60% of all personnel. (Kamalov 1966: 20)

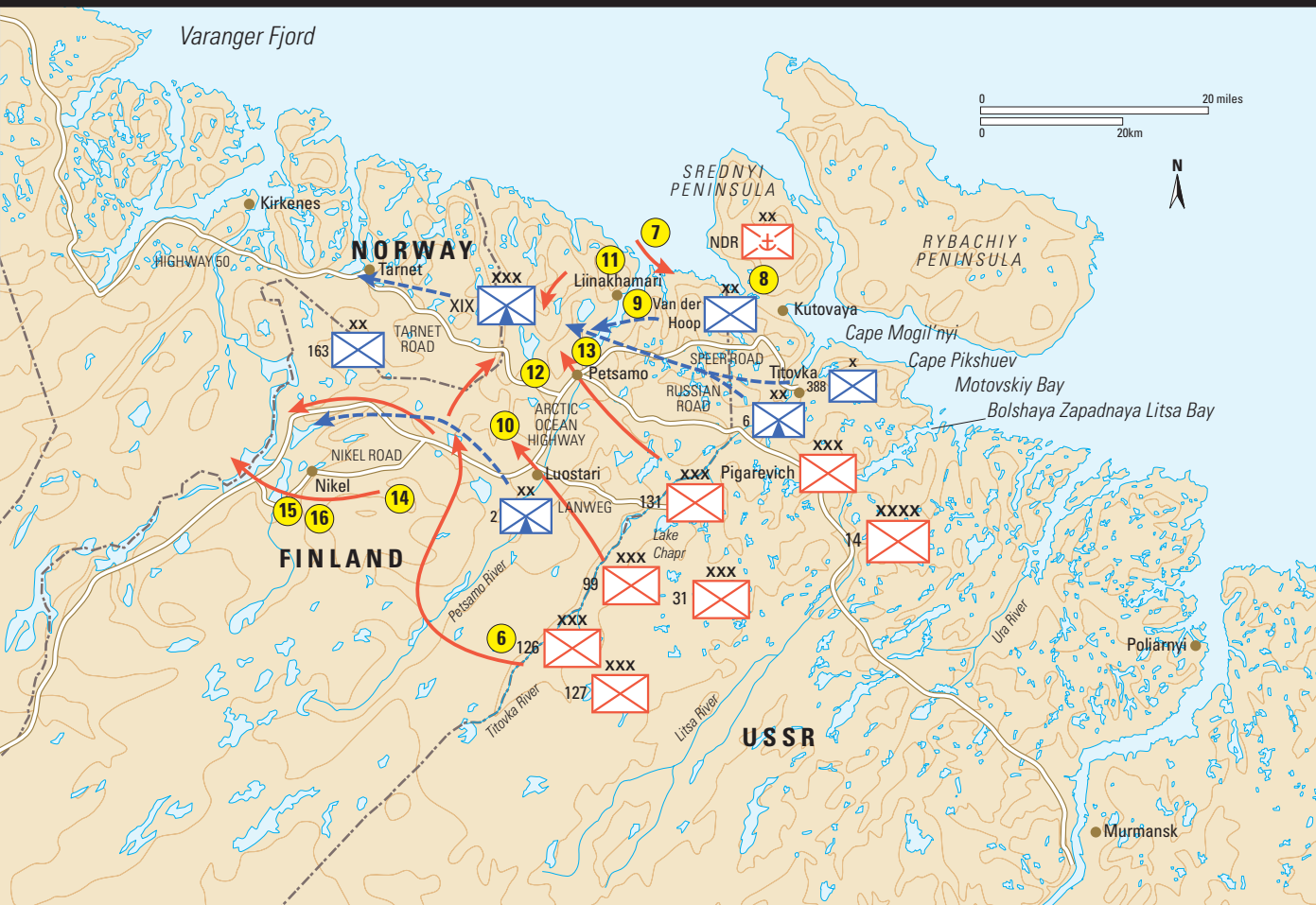
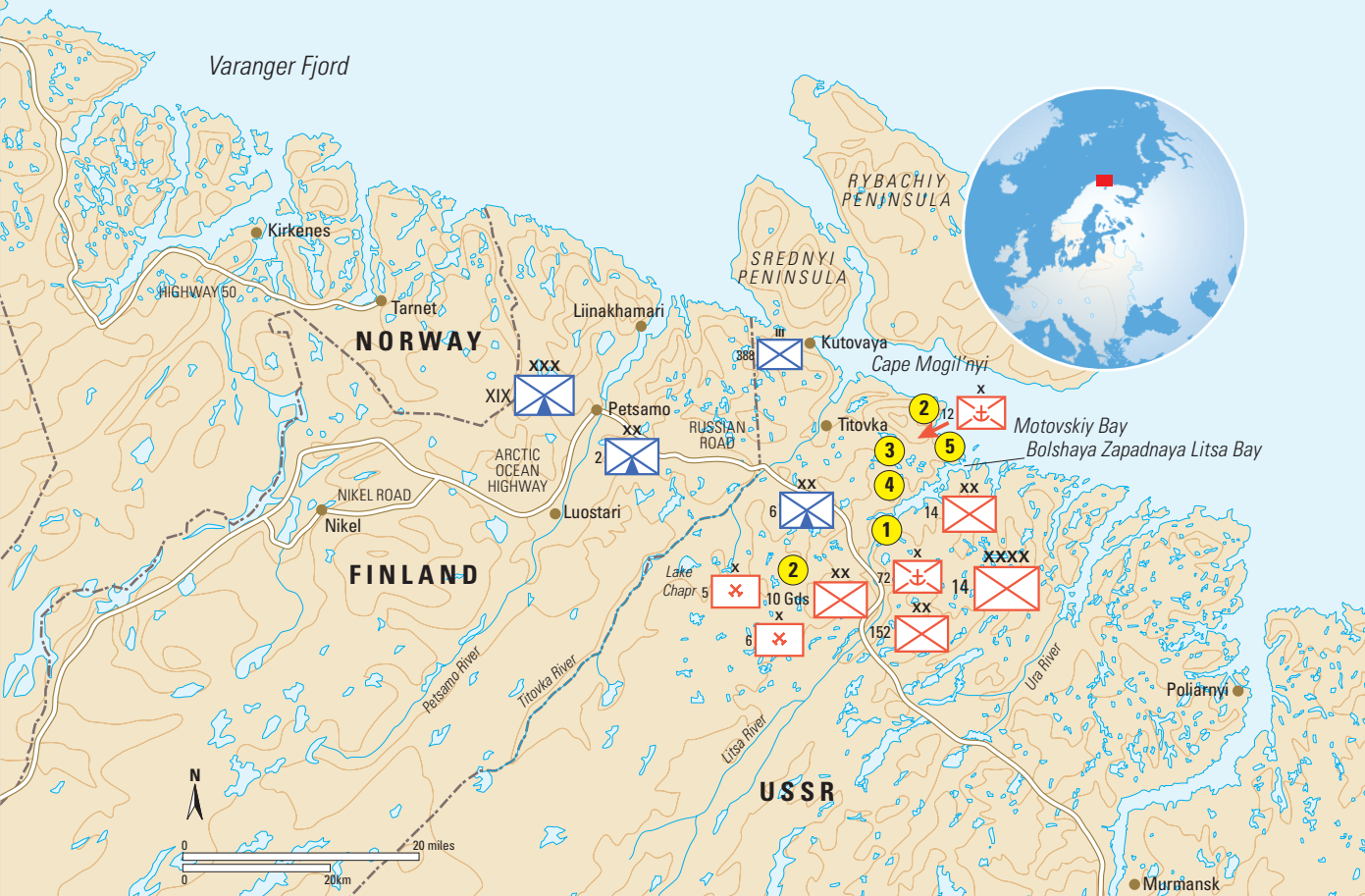
In 1941–42 Soviet naval units would win their reputation not only through their defence of ports and cities, but in tactical and operational-

Operations in the northern Arctic, 1942 and 1944

MAP KEY

- 1 April 1942:** Elements of the recently arrived 6. Gebirgs-Division occupy defensive winter positions prepared after the Germans pushed across the Litsa River in 1941.
- 2 Late April 1942:** The Soviets launch a spring offensive, including on 28 April an amphibious assault by the 12th Naval Infantry Brigade on the south shore of Motovskiy Bay. The Northern Fleet's scout detachment lands at Cape Mogil'nyi and moves inland to Hill 415.3. Meanwhile, on the Litsa River the Soviet ground offensive soon stalls. The 152nd Rifle Division arrives too late to make a difference.
- 3 1 May 1942:** Having advanced 15–18km inland, the 12th Naval Infantry Brigade is forced to stop, in part due to the worsening weather, but also because the Germans are forming various units from 6. Gebirgs-Division into battle groups. Elements of 2. Gebirgs-Division in reserve are also brought up.
- 4 4 May 1942:** Major Helmuth Raithel, the commander of II./GJR 143, launches his battle group in a successful attack on Hill 70 prior to an attack on Hill 172.3 the next day.
- 5 13 May 1942:** A Soviet re-embarkation begins as German attacks from multiple battle groups have pushed the naval infantry towards the coast.
- 6 7 October 1944:** An offensive to recapture Petsamo and drive the Germans into Norway begins. The 126th and 127th Light Rifle corps are tasked with a wide enveloping manoeuvre across the tundra.
- 7 2330hrs, 9 October 1944:** The 63rd Naval Infantry Brigade and Captain I.P. Barchenko-Emel'ianov's scouts land on the south shore of Malaya Volokovaya Inlet.
- 8 0330hrs, 10 October 1944:** The 12th Naval Infantry Brigade attacks German defences on the Musta hills.
- 9 0630hrs, 12 October 1944:** Barchenko-Emel'ianov attacks the gun batteries on Cape Krestovyi. Senior Lieutenant Viktor Leonov's men capture the anti-aircraft guns of 3./gemFlaKAbt 302, but the heavy guns of 1./HKAA 773 remain in German hands.
- 10 1200hrs, 12 October 1944:** The 99th Rifle Corps captures Luostari and fends off counter-attacks from 163. Infanterie-Division that moved up from central Finland on 10 October.
- 11 2310hrs, 12 October 1944:** Major I.A. Timofeev's composite battalion begins to land at Liinakhamari. The port is captured and at midday on 13 October a counter-attack by I./GJR 143 is repelled.
- 12 Early evening, 13 October 1944:** The 72nd Naval Rifle Brigade, blocking the Tarnet Road, and the 70th Naval Rifle Brigade, defending heights to the south, are pushed aside, allowing the Germans to retreat.
- 13 Early morning, 15 October 1944:** With Soviet forces pressing in from the north and south, Petsamo is captured.
- 14 Evening, 18 October 1944:** The 127th Light Rifle Corps begins another enveloping manoeuvre across the tundra heading for Nikel.
- 15 Mid-morning, 21 October 1944:** I./GJR 137 attacks and defeats the 3rd Battalion, 70th Naval Rifle Brigade, which is astride the Nikel Road, allowing III./GJR 137 to escape.
- 16 Early morning, 22 October 1944:** Nikel is captured by the Soviets. 2. Gebirgs-Division retreats south pursued by the 31st Rifle Corps.

sized amphibious landings that struck at the flank of the advancing Axis forces. During the course of the war, 113 amphibious assaults were carried out in which over 330,000 personnel were landed, as well as 46 major reconnaissance operations. Landings were aimed at the enemy's rear and flanks, with the intention of distracting enemy forces, foiling his offensive operations and giving time for ground units to regroup. Later in the war the Soviet naval units helped breach Axis defences on the maritime flank, seized bridgeheads for offensive operations and captured enemy ports and bases. By 1944, especially in the northern Arctic, naval rifle brigades were also used for deep outflanking marches, across difficult terrain dominated by rocky hills and interspersed with ravines and swampy depressions, in order to sit astride German lines of communication. Such operations shared many attributes with amphibious landings; both were hazardous and fraught with difficulty.



The Opposing Sides

ORIGINS AND DOCTRINE

Soviet

Russia formed its first naval infantry units in 1705, but it was during the October Revolution and the ensuing Russian Civil War (1917–22) that such troops achieved national recognition, only to be disbanded at the end of hostilities. They did not reappear until July 1939, and in 1940 were designated the 1st Naval Infantry Brigade. The Axis invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 prompted rapid expansion. Many naval bases were soon threatened by enemy ground forces, and Soviet base personnel as well as those not manning ships were hastily organized into an array of different units to defend their approaches, or sent to Red Army units as reinforcements. The Northern Fleet, which was responsible for the Barents Sea, hastily formed the 122nd, 125th and 126th Naval Infantry regiments and the 17th and 18th Naval Infantry battalions and also replenished units of the Northern Defensive Region (NDR).

Of the 21 naval infantry brigades (including the 1st) that would eventually be recruited, the Northern Fleet formed just one – the 12th Naval Infantry Brigade – because the fleet had plenty of ships to crew. The Baltic Fleet would form ten brigades (many used in the defence of Leningrad and the Finnish border in Karelia, with the 3rd Naval Infantry Brigade moving to the northern Arctic in September 1944), the Pacific Fleet one and the Black Sea Fleet eight (in 1941, three naval regiments defended Odessa and in 1942 four naval infantry brigades, three regiments and several separate battalions defended Sevastopol).

A naval infantry brigade usually comprised four to six battalions, one or two artillery battalions, mortar units and service units. The 12th Naval Infantry Brigade was recruited in September 1941 with three battalions and more followed: in October the 4th and 5th, by the end of 1941 the 6th and in early



1942, unusually, the 7th. Because no large landing ships were available, the battalions had no weapons more substantial than 82mm mortars or 45mm guns. By June 1943, two battalions were permanently handed to the NDR and the brigade was reorganized into four infantry battalions (each with three infantry companies, a machine-gun company and a mortar company with 12 120mm mortars), an artillery battalion (12 76mm guns), an anti-tank battalion (12 45mm guns), a signals battalion (two companies), an SMG company and a reconnaissance company. During a major landing, naval infantry brigades frequently went ashore jointly with ground troops and were in the first echelon. When operating independently, they usually landed at two or three points and (depending on the terrain and the enemy's defences) on a frontage 800–1,000m wide in two echelons, an artillery group and reserves.

On 18 October 1941, a decree announced the establishment of 25 naval rifle brigades; an additional eight would be established later. They were not formed within the composition of the operating fleets and flotillas, but far away from the fronts (for example, in the Urals and in Siberia). Many comprised personnel from the Pacific and Black Sea fleets. Their three rifle battalions (each with three rifle companies and a machine-gun company) lacked a mortar company; however, at brigade level there was a mortar battalion (16 82mm and eight 120mm mortars), an anti-tank battalion (12 57mm guns) and an artillery battalion (12 76mm guns).

In July 1942 the Northern Fleet was made responsible for defending the Srednyi Isthmus in the northern Arctic. Some 5,200m wide, the isthmus defended the approach to the larger Rybachiy Peninsula, which was on the flank of the approach to Murmansk, and would be permanently defended by a naval brigade reinforced by a Red Army machine-gun battalion and an artillery regiment. The 23rd Fortified Area, 104th Artillery Regiment, 12th and 63rd Naval Infantry brigades, 254th Naval Rifle Brigade, 347th, 348th and 349th Separate Machine Gun battalions and two artillery battalions all operated within the NDR, commanded by General-Lieutenant S.I. Kabanov.

Early in the war, the Soviets made tactical amphibious assaults to slow the enemy advance and enable ground troops to hold their lines; the immediate requirements of a situation and the importance of achieving surprise frequently led to the hasty dispatch of landing forces, however. In the Baltic Sea in particular, many small-scale landings were made that lacked preparation and training. Here, a party of naval infantry lands somewhere on the Baltic coast in 1941. (Photo by: Sovfoto/UiG via Getty Images)



This plate depicts a naval infantryman from a composite battalion that was hurriedly put together to carry out an amphibious landing to capture Liinakhamari on the night of 12/13 October 1944. He was transported to the port by one of the small motor boats that had to evade detection by German shore batteries and disembark directly onto landing piers. As he went ashore, some trepidation mixed with surprise at his unexpected assignment combined to test his training; that morning he would have had little time to prepare defences to repel a counter-attack.

Liinakhamari, 13 October 1944



Weapons, dress and equipment

His weapon is the extremely robust and reliable PPSH-41 submachine gun (1). He wears a *telogreika* padded winter jacket (2) that was also frequently worn in spring and autumn. The earlier M41 version had large, folded-down collars on which rank insignia were displayed. The later M43 pattern, worn here, replaced the large collar with a short upstanding collar buttoned at the top; insignia for officers and senior NCOs was displayed on shoulder

boards, but many NCOs chose not to wear any sort of shoulder board. Padded trousers (3) are also worn. His *ushanka* hat (4), made with synthetic fur, has side ear flaps that could be worn down or tied up. He has an F1 fragmentation grenade (5), a pouch for a spare drum magazine (6) and a water-bottle holder (7) attached to his belt. He carries a backpack (8) called a *veschmeschok*. His equipment weighs approximately 18kg.

German

In 1916, Germany fielded the *Alpenkorps* – a division-sized formation of two brigades – raised around a nucleus of volunteers with mountain experience. In 1919 the Treaty of Versailles permitted Germany to retain one battalion, but in June 1935 the three Bavarian regiments that included *Jäger* trained to operate in low-lying hills were brought together at Garmisch-Partenkirchen into a *Gebirgs-Brigade*, expanded into 1. Gebirgs-Division in April 1938. Having fielded mountain troops since 1906, Austria retained six mountain regiments and four mountain battalions after 1918. Following the *Anschluss* with Germany in March 1938, these units were formed into 2. and 3. Gebirgs-Divisionen.

The performance of mountain troops in Norway in 1940 fully justified their elite status. In April they were transported by ship to the Norwegian ports of Trondheim and Narvik and seized them by surprise. Others were flown in as reinforcements or carried out long marches north through arctic and mountainous terrain to relieve German forces at Narvik. In April 1941, during the invasion of Greece, they were frequently used to outflank Allied defensive positions in mountain passes. During the assault on Crete the following month they secured Maleme airfield, which was under the partial control of German airborne troops. This deployment proved decisive, and the airborne troops were saved from an ignominious defeat. In total, ten *Gebirgs-Divisionen* would eventually be raised by the Heer (Army) and three by the Waffen-SS.

Mountain units were expected to operate more independently than regular infantry and their battalions, equipped with two 7.5cm infantry guns, and their companies, each with two 8cm mortars and two heavy machine guns (HMGs), were more resilient. Each division fielded two instead of three

regiments, each with three battalions. In early 1942, each battalion had a *schwere Kompanie* (4. Kompanie) with an *Infanteriegeschütz-Zug* and a *Pionier-Zug*; a *Maschinengewehr-Kompanie* (5. Kompanie) with three *Maschinengewehr-Züge*; and three *Gebirgs-Kompanien* (numbered 1–3), each with three *Züge* (each of four *Gruppen*). By 1944, the *schwere Kompanie* had four 12cm mortars as well as two 7.5cm guns and a *Pionier-Zug*, and each *Gebirgs-Kompanie* (three *Züge*, each with three *Gruppen*) fielded two HMGs, nine LMGs and two 8cm mortars. In 1944 each *Gruppe* (comprising an NCO and nine men) was theoretically equipped with two rifles, seven SMGs, an LMG and a pistol. The regimental HQ had a *Nachrichten-Zug*, a 12cm *Granatwerfer-Zug*, an *Aufklärungs-Zug* and a *Radfahr-Zug*; also available was a *Panzerjäger-Kompanie* with one *Zug* armed with three 7.5cm anti-tank guns and another equipped with the *Panzerschreck* hand-held rocket launcher. Divisional combat units included a *Radfahr-Abteilung*, a *Gebirgs-Artillerie-Regiment* with specially designed mountain guns, a *Gebirgs-Pionier-Bataillon* and a *Gebirgs-Panzerjäger-Bataillon*.

Gebirgsjäger and soldiers from Grenadier-Brigade 503 had cold-weather clothing and were given basic instruction in skiing. Here, a recruit from Grenadier-Brigade 503 equipped with an SMG is on snow patrol across the low-lying hills of the northern Arctic. (Simon Orchard)



RECRUITMENT, LOGISTICS AND MORALE

Soviet

Although volunteers were in abundance – within 48 hours of the German invasion, some 12,000 seamen volunteered, forming the 12th Naval Infantry Brigade – soon more men were required than the Soviet Navy could provide. In October 1941, a new military-service law stipulated that all those aged between 16 and 50 were liable for military duty, either in the ranks or military industry; this took time to be enforced, and volunteers for service were still expected throughout the war. That month the General Staff called on the Soviet Navy headquarters and schools to provide naval rifle brigades with recruits, but of 108,350 men needed, only 37,287 were from the Navy: these included 12,000 each from the Black Sea and Pacific fleets, approximately 8,000 from the headquarters and training establishments, and nearly 3,000 from the Amur and Caspian flotillas.

The 63rd Naval Rifle Brigade was formed in the Urals in October–December 1941 and sent to the Arkhangelsk Military District in January 1942. Later that year the unit was made into a naval infantry brigade. The 69th Naval Rifle Brigade was formed in Siberia in October–November 1941 with cadres from the Pacific Fleet and Naval Headquarters. In January 1942 the unit was fighting the Finns along the Svir River and in September 1944, as part of the 126th Light Rifle Corps, would transfer to the northern Arctic. The 70th Naval Rifle Brigade was formed in Siberia in October–December 1941 with cadres from the Pacific Fleet, the Amur Flotilla, and naval schools. In June 1944 it carried out an amphibious landing on Lake Ladoga and in September was part of the 126th Light Rifle Corps. The 72nd Naval Rifle Brigade was formed in Siberia in October–November 1941 with a cadre from the Pacific Fleet. It had three rifle battalions, an artillery battalion and



The Northern Fleet's reconnaissance unit soon learnt the importance of their weapons. On 19 July 1941, they landed on the west bank of the Litsa River to distract the Axis forces from attacking a nearby naval infantry unit and were supposed to carry out an orderly withdrawal, but some Soviet personnel threw away their weapons. Viktor Leonov, a recruit to the unit, recalled that his unit had a female medic; here, a naval infantryman equipped with an SVT-40 semi-automatic rifle and grenades, is pictured in discussion with a female medic. (Photo by Voller Ernst/ullstein bild via Getty Images)

In 1941, naval infantry lacked basic training; while displaying great valour, many had swapped their helmets for naval caps, and their aversion to moving crouched and willingness to stand upright contributed to heavy losses. Here, during an inspection, recruits all carry the PPSH-41 SMG. (Nik Cornish at www.stavka.org.uk)



a mortar battalion. In April 1942 it was part of the Soviet offensive in the northern Arctic and attempted to cross the Litsa River. In October 1944 the unit was part of the 127th Light Rifle Corps and participated in the Petsamo offensive. The 254th Naval Rifle Brigade was formed in July 1942 in the northern Arctic from the Red Army's 135th Rifle Regiment and had four rifle battalions and an artillery battalion. In September 1944 it was disbanded and its troops were distributed to base units.

As a rule, enlisted personnel were not more than 35 years old. Typically, on 1 January 1943, in the 5th Naval Infantry Brigade, 329 men were aged up to 20 years, 1,103 men up to 25 years, 661 up to 30 years and 676 up to 35 years; only 397 men were aged over 35. Workers made up the basic nucleus. For example, in August 1942, the 61st Naval Rifle Brigade had 1,617 workers, 606 farmers and 1,088 white-collar workers; the 79th Naval Rifle Brigade had 2,157 workers, 1,341 farmers and 1,022 white-collar workers. Soldiers of over 40 nationalities fought in the 80th Naval Rifle Brigade.

In July 1941, Arseniy Golovko, who as a counter admiral was commander of the Northern Fleet, created a specialist Naval Reconnaissance Unit. He wanted information about enemy movements at Norwegian and Finnish ports that could indicate the Germans were preparing an amphibious operation against his base at Poliarnyi. Intelligence chief Captain 3rd Rank P. Vizgin accepted volunteers from the commercial fleet, military and civilian sports clubs, and Norwegian communists. Senior Lieutenant P. Sutyagia, a Norwegian speaker, led a platoon that included Norwegians to infiltrate and observe German troop movements. Major L. Dobrotin, head of ground intelligence collection, recruited 65–70 men from sports clubs for another two platoons. The fleet physical-training instructor, Captain Domozhirov, was brought in. Another physical trainer, Intendant 3rd Rank N. Inzartsev, was appointed the deputy commander. Several recruits were superior athletes. Vladimir Oliashev was a Champion of the Soviet Union in skiing and Ivan Lysenko, a radio operator, was a wrestling champion.



Membership of the Communist Party in naval infantry and rifle brigades was encouraged and could reach 40–50 per cent of all personnel (usually, one in nine of all armed-forces personnel were members, rising to 25 per cent in 1945). There were 4,500 registered communists in the three naval infantry brigades of the Northern Fleet, equating to approximately 33 per cent of total personnel. Requests for admission increased before battle, when the desire of soldiers to enter the Party intensified. Prior to the attack across the Srednyi Peninsula in October 1944, 1,343 applications to join the Party were made in the 12th Naval Infantry Brigade.

Many Soviet recruits were idealistic. Although many were fervent communists, others hated Stalin and fought for more patriotic notions of Russia. Many realized that the Soviet Union had many injustices, but hoped for a better socialist future. For party members in particular, the idea of the socialist state and the threat that fascism represented were important motivations. Here, naval personnel attend a parade with a portrait of Stalin prominent. (Photo by Voller Ernst/ullstein bild via Getty Images)

German

In 1938, 2. Gebirgs-Division, based in Innsbruck, was formed from the Bundesheer's 6. Infanterie-Division; 3. Gebirgs-Division was formed in Graz from 5. and 7. Infanterie-Divisionen. In September 1939, both formations marched 320km across southern Poland to capture Lwów (now Lviv, Ukraine). From April 1940, following landing by sea, Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 139 (3. Gebirgs-Division) fought in the Narvik area of Norway. An Allied expeditionary force nearly pushed the mountain troops into internment in neutral Sweden. In June 1940, 2. Gebirgs-Division and other elements of 3. Gebirgs-Division reached Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 139 and both divisions occupied northern Norway before deployment to the Arctic as Gebirgskorps Norwegen to attack the Soviet Union in June 1941. 2. Gebirgs-Division would remain there until November 1944, while 3. Gebirgs-Division would move to Russia in the autumn of 1942. The commanding officer



Gebirgsjäger, depicted here in the northern Arctic, were given a large-capacity rucksack. Inside, the soldier would have a groundsheet, blanket, wind-cheater, spare shirt, spare pants, spare socks, balaclava, gloves, mess-tin, cutlery, rations, a *Juwel* stove designed for use in the mountains, washing gear, torch, low boots, crampons, snow shoes, *Zeltbahn* (shelter-quarter), climbing gear and compass. (Author's Collection)

of 2. Gebirgs-Division in October 1944 was a German, Generalleutnant Hans Degen, who as a *Major* had commanded a company in 1. Gebirgs-Division in 1938. From November 1938 to October 1939 Degen was the operations officer for 2. Gebirgs-Division. He served in the Arctic from July 1942.

In Germany, prior to the introduction of military conscription in 1935, recruits to the Heer could choose their branch of service. Later, those who wanted to make the military their career were distinguished from those who were recruited only for wartime; the former were attracted to service with the mountain troops by the publicity generated by their elite status, notions of romantic service in the mountains, and wartime combat achievements. Initially, many served for six months in the Reichsarbeitsdienst (RAD, or Reich Labour Service), which was compulsory for men aged between 18 and 25 and provided military training before their proper military service. During World War II, RAD units were designated as auxiliary units and provided combat support services, for

example building coastal fortifications. One recruit, Rudi Hebenstreit, was born in Leipzig in 1925 and volunteered for the RAD in October 1941. In January 1943 he joined Gebirgs-Ersatz-Regiment 138 (originally part of 3. Gebirgs-Division) in Marburg, Germany and then moved in May to Feld-Ersatz-Bataillon 91 (part of 6. Gebirgs-Division) in the northern Arctic. From September 1943 to January 1945 he was a member of 7./GJR 141 (still in 6. Gebirgs-Division) and then transferred to III./GrenBrig 503 in northern Norway. His battalion commander was Major Georg Gebhard, who similarly was originally a *Gebirgsjäger*. Born in 1911 in Augsburg, Bavaria, he served as an NCO in Infanterie-Regiment 19 in the early 1930s, before transferring to the Gebirgs-Brigade. From November 1939 to June 1940 he was at Bad Reichenhall officer academy. In July 1940 he was a platoon commander in Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 143, and by August 1941 a company commander (from November 1941 to March 1942, of 8./GJR 143). By May 1943 he was commanding Feld-Ersatz-Bataillon 91, and in February 1944 transferred to Grenadier-Brigade 503 as commander of III./GrenBrig 503.

In June 1940, 6. Gebirgs-Division formed at Heuberg, partly from men from Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 139 (3. Gebirgs-Division) that had not deployed to Norway and also from new German and Austrian recruits. Their home base was Klagenfurt in Austria. Occupation duty in France and then Poland was followed by the division's first campaign, in Greece during April 1941. They broke through the Metaxas Line of fortifications north of Salonika and in May were air-landed at Maleme airfield on Crete. This was followed in September by redeployment to the Arctic, where the division remained for the rest of the war. Generalmajor (later Generalfeldmarschall) Ferdinand Schörner was the divisional commander until January 1942. In July 1945 there were 6,351



The *Gebirgs-Pionier-Bataillon* was responsible for building and clearing obstacles, bridging fast-flowing mountain streams, and improving supply routes by blasting routes and building aerial railways. *Gebirgspioniere* were also trained to rig rope-bridges over chasms and build log cabins and fortifications. Here, a *Gebirgspionier* stands near a recently built bridge in Lapland. (Author's Collection)

Austrians, mainly from 6. Gebirgs-Division, remaining in uniform in the Tromsø area of northern Norway where the division was billeted.

Born in 1907 in Ingolstadt, Bavaria, Helmuth Raithel was a German recruit to 6. Gebirgs-Division who joined the Reichswehr as an *Offizieranwärter* (officer cadet) in 1926. He was a *Gebirgsjäger* platoon commander in Infanterie-Regiment 19, a company commander in the Gebirgs-Brigade and, in 1938, regimental adjutant in 1. Gebirgs-Division. In 1939 he was a mountain instructor and then in August 1940, when 6. Gebirgs-Division formed, he was appointed commander of II./GJR 143. He deployed to Finland in September 1941, was promoted *Major* on 1 November, and stayed there until August 1942 when he transferred to the mountain-warfare school. 6. Gebirgs-Division also had many Austrian recruits. Raithel's adjutant from January 1942, Leutnant der Reserve Eckhardt Dewitz, was one such who joined Infanterie-Ersatz-Bataillon 323 in February 1940 before transferring to Infanterie-Regiment 178 that July. In September 1941 he transferred to 6. Gebirgs-Division and in October was at the Infanterie-Schule Döberitz before joining Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 143 in the northern Arctic.



This plate depicts a *Gebirgsjäger* NCO during the German counter-attack against the port of Liinakhamari on 13 October 1944. Before the launch of the Soviet offensive on 7 October, his regiment, which belonged to 6. Gebirgs-Division, had occupied defensive positions in the northern Arctic since the winter of 1941/42. The Soviet amphibious assault against Liinakhamari earlier in the day was not a complete surprise since the battery at Cape Krestovyi helping to guard the harbour entrance had been attacked on 12 October. Grenadier-Brigade 503 and Aufklärungs-Abteilung 112 had suffered heavy losses during a counter-attack on the battery that day, and he would have expected a head-on clash with the naval infantry at Liinakhamari to be similarly dangerous. Responding to the attack required quick decision-making and decisive action.

Liinakhamari, 13 October 1944



Weapons, dress and equipment

His weapon is the MP 40 (1), a submachine gun designed in 1938 that had a 32-round magazine and forward-folding metal stock. A Modell 1924 *Stielhandgranate* stick grenade (2) is tucked into his belt. A holster for a Walther P 38 pistol (3) is also attached, as are ammunition pouches for three MP 40 magazines (4).

Uniform comprised a reversible winter jacket (5) with integral hood that was heavily padded against the cold. The grey side is worn and the white side on the reverse is visible as his jacket is slightly open. There are three button-down pockets across the chest and two pockets at the rear. He wears baggy M39 field-grey trousers

(*Berghose*; 6) that were bound to the climbing boots (*Bergstiefel*) by ankle wrap puttees (*Gelenkbinden*; 7) to keep the feet dry. He wears an M1943 field-service cap (*Einheitsfeldmütze*; 8) with the distinctive metal Edelweiss mountain badge worn by mountain troops.

He carries a mountain rucksack (9) that had many compartments, and a water bottle (*Feldflasche*; 10) larger than standard issue is hanging on a D-ring on the bread bag (*Brotbeutel*; 11). His sleeping bag was of quilted wool and he had an air mattress to insulate against the cold and damp. All told, his equipment with a full rucksack would weigh approximately 32kg.

WEAPONS, TRAINING AND TACTICS

Soviet

Naval infantry relied heavily on personal infantry weapons during landing. Weighing 4kg and with an effective range of 500m, the Mosin-Nagant Model 1891/30 bolt-action rifle was basic issue; it had a non-detachable, five-round magazine that was reloaded individually or with five-round stripper clips. Snipers used the rifle with telescopic sights at ranges up to 800m. The gas-operated SVT-40 semi-automatic rifle with a ten-round detachable magazine was issued prolifically to the naval infantry. More effective than both rifles in short-range firefights, the PPSH-41 submachine gun (SMG), relatively long at 843mm, had a rate of fire of 900rd/min and weighed 5.45kg with a 71-round drum magazine fitted; range was only 200m, however. In 1942, the shorter and lighter PPS-42 SMG was developed, leading on to the PPS-43. With stock folded, the PPS-43 was 615mm long and with a loaded magazine weighed only 3.67kg; it had a rate of fire of 650rd/min. Three magazines, each with 35 rounds, were carried in a pouch, and boxed ammunition in a pack.

Weighing 11.5kg loaded, the DP-27 (nicknamed the 'Record Player' because of its distinctive pan-shaped magazine) was the standard Soviet light machine gun (LMG). Because the DP-27 was not belt-fed, its rate of fire (550rd/min) was severely limited; the magazine was small (47 rounds), difficult to carry and reload, and prone to damage. Machine-gun companies were equipped with the PM M1910, a wheeled HMG that had a gun shield and could fire at 600rd/min from 250-round belts. The gun was heavy, weighing in at 64.3kg, and was replaced from 1943 by the SG-43 Goryunov MMG, which on a wheeled mount weighed only 41kg and could fire at a rate of 500–700rd/min from a 200- or 250-round belt. The DShK 1938, an HMG that fired a 12.7mm bullet from 50-round belts at 600rd/min and weighed 157kg on a wheeled mounting, was hardly ever used.

Pre-war combat training in amphibious landings revealed excessive optimism and emphasized the sea transport of forces rather than the tactics needed to establish a beachhead. According to doctrine, landing at dawn was recommended in order to assist passage to the shore, but during wartime, concealing the approach of ships at night to protect them from enemy defences and air power would be more important. An ability to get ashore and maintain a beachhead was soon demonstrated. On the night of 21/22 September 1941, the 3rd Naval Infantry Regiment was transported to the landing area near Odessa by two cruisers, two destroyers, a gunboat, several escort ships, ten launches and 19 boats. When the supporting naval bombardment stopped, the Axis defenders noticed small ships heading for the shore at full speed and opened up intermittent and ineffective defensive fire. By 0200hrs, a company headed by Junior Lieutenant Chorupa was ashore. A coastal battery was captured and turned on the enemy. By 0500hrs, all units of the regiment were landed. At that same moment, Major M. Orlov's airborne sailors landed in the enemy's rear. A land assault by Red Army units followed at 0800hrs.



The SVT-40 semi-automatic rifle, carried by many of the Soviet personnel pictured here in the Arctic, suffered from vertical shot dispersal and necessitated more maintenance and repair training than did the Mosin-Nagant Model 1891/30 bolt-action rifle. In Red Army units, one-third of the infantry were supposed to have SVT-40s, but many were lost during the first months of the war. Production declined in 1942 as factories turned out more PPSH-41 SMGs, but many SVT-40s had already been issued to the naval infantry. (Photo by Voller Ernst/ullstein bild via Getty Images)

Naval infantry, frequently the assault troops of a larger amphibious landing, could penetrate coastal defences to permit follow-on forces to land. During the Kerch–Feodosiya operation in the Crimea on 29 December 1941, three battalions of the 83rd Naval Infantry Brigade in stormy weather served as forward detachments for the 224th Rifle Division and 124th Rifle Brigade. The Soviets showed an ability to reinforce success quickly. On 3 February 1943, at Stanichki on the Black Sea, Major Ts.L. Kunikov's composite naval infantry detachment (initially designed to be a diversionary force for a larger landing further down the coast) captured a beachhead 4km wide and 2.5km deep that was widened with the help of the 255th and 83rd Naval Infantry brigades. Of Kunikov's 250 experienced volunteers, 193 were Communist Party and Komsomol (the youth branch of the Communist Party) members who had undergone prolonged training in dealing with obstacles ashore and neutralizing defensive installations.

For a landing, various groups were created within the naval battalion: reconnaissance, obstacle-clearing and assault groups to capture field fortifications. The immediate objectives were 1–2.5km deep and subsequent objectives 2.5–5km. The brigade received an objective depth of 10–15km. The width of the zone of advance was usually equal to the landing frontage: 2–8km, depending on force composition and reinforcements available. The landing was ideally either on an unprepared coast or directly at a port. While in 1941–42 12 per cent of the total assault landings were accomplished at a port, in 1944–45 the figure was 43 per cent. For example, on 29 December 1941, 300 naval infantrymen under Senior Lieutenant A.F. Aydanov disembarked directly at the port of Feodosiya, capturing moorings for ships that were carrying subsequent echelons. A coast guard cutter landed an assault group on a protecting breakwater that captured the lighthouse and turned on the light for the benefit of follow-on boats.

The Naval Reconnaissance Unit carried out more advanced training. In July 1941, Senior Lieutenant G. Lebedev provided instruction in day- and night-movement techniques, camouflage and concealment skills, the crossing of water obstacles, cross-country skiing, parachuting and reconnaissance-related skills. One recruit, Viktor Leonov, was ordered to research appropriate



The naval infantry relied more on mortars than artillery because they were easier to transport. A company had one 50mm RM-40 or RM-41 mortar that weighed 12.1kg and had a range of 800m. The battalion had a mortar company with 16 82mm PM-41 mortars; the PM-41 had a removable wheel base and was more manoeuvrable than the earlier 82mm BM-37. Range was up to 3,040m and weight, 56kg. The brigade had 12 120mm M1938 mortars; the M1938 could be transported on a wheeled carriage or split into three parts: barrel, bipod and base-plate. Range was 5,900m and weight, 282kg. Here, 82mm mortars commence firing. (Courtesy of the Central Museum of the Armed Forces, Moscow via Stavka)

winter clothing and footwear from local reindeer herders and cross-country ski clubs that were light, durable and warm, and could protect wounded personnel carried on sleds. Individual training to harden recruits was carried out, with sports an integral component before collective training in tactics and other disciplines. The force also had language capabilities for the immediate exploitation of prisoners, documents and enemy telephone communications. Planning for raids included force composition, in particular what weapons were needed, the landing, actions once ashore, extraction and the communications plan.

Operations included long-range patrolling, surveillance of enemy movements and installations, coast-watching, the capture and interrogation of prisoners, and raids. During 13–16 July 1941 the unit reconnoitred the area around Titovka following landing by sea. In September, smaller operations deeper behind enemy lines were conducted with Norwegians to monitor Axis naval traffic around the Varanger Peninsula. On 24 October a raid by 100 men at Cape Motovskiy was carried out. On another raid Lebedev was killed, and Dobrotin and Leonov were wounded. In November, a naval infantry company joined the unit for a raid on an ammunition dump. There were also attempts to reconnoitre the German airfield at Luostari and the mines at Nikel. In April 1942, Commissar Dubrovskiy (brought in the previous October) informed the unit that in order to distract German attention from the 12th Naval Infantry Brigade, the unit would have to operate for several days behind enemy lines.



In October 1944, during the build-up to the raid on the enemy batteries on Cape Krestovyi, the Naval Reconnaissance Unit practised on terrain similar to their objective. Final preparations included coordination with naval aviation. Personnel from other branches of service were invited to social events and the commissar's lectures referred to how their reputation was spreading to the families' home towns. Sailors were recommended as new members of the Communist Party. General-Major E.T. Dubovtsev (Kabanov's replacement as head of the NDR) told Leonov that Moscow knew about the raid.

German

Weighing 3.9kg, the Mauser Kar 98k bolt-action rifle was standard issue, but the Mauser Gew 33/40, 11.5cm shorter, was also in use by the *Gebirgsjäger*. Sharpshooters had telescopic sights, either the ZF 41 that gave 2.5× magnification or the ZF 4 that gave 4× magnification. Grenades fired by rifles were particularly effective in mountain terrain as rock chips created by the blast could make lethal shrapnel. The MP 38/40 machine pistol was provided for squad leaders and weighed 4.1kg. The weapon was not as rugged as the Soviet PPSH-41 SMG, as dirt could more easily access the MP 40's bolt mechanism, causing a blockage. At 500rd/min the German weapon had a slower rate of fire; its single-stack magazine was difficult to fire in the prone

Leonov stated that one-third of the reconnaissance detachment carried PPSH-41 SMGs and the rest rifles. Each man carried 300 rounds of ammunition and four grenades; at first, grenades were problematic for Leonov, as on 22 July 1941 he failed to arm one properly. A plunger had to be inserted to activate the time-delayed fuse. Anti-tank grenades in particular were used on bunkers. Here are some early naval infantry recruits armed with rifles, grenades and PPSH-41 SMGs. (From the fonds of the RGAKFD in Krasnogorsk via Stavka)

A *Gebirgsjäger*-Zug had a 5cm leGrW 36 mortar that could throw a 9kg projectile 500m and was broken down into a barrel and base-plate for carrying. Each *Kompanie* had a *Granatwerfer-Gruppe* that fielded two 8cm mortars. In late 1941 the short-barrelled 8cm kzGrW 42 mortar, throwing a 3.5kg projectile up to 1,000m, was introduced; it weighed 26.5kg and could be transported in three loads. The Germans also used the Soviet 120mm mortar as a regimental weapon, designating captured examples GrW 378(r); it fired a 16kg shell 4.8km. A German copy was issued as the GrW 42. Here, an 8cm mortar manned by *Gebirgsjäger* is set up near an Arctic fjord. (Author's Collection)



position and more susceptible to damage. Unsurprisingly, the Germans also used captured examples of the PPSH-41; a version that could accommodate the MP 40 magazine was produced and designated the MP 41(r), but this was not as popular as the PPSH-41 itself, as the latter's 71-round drum magazine was preferred. Firing from a 30-round magazine and weighing 5.2kg, the StG 44 assault rifle was used in small numbers late in the war; earlier versions were called the MP 43 and MP 44. Some *Gebirgsjäger* NCOs were issued these automatic rifles as replacements for their MP 40s, but Oberstleutnant Hans Roschmann, the operations officer of 2. Gebirgs-Division, would bemoan their absence from *Gebirgsjäger*-Regiment 137 in October 1944.

The MG 34 was the basic squad machine gun and weighed 12kg. The improved MG 42 weighed 11kg and had a quick barrel-change facility. Deployed with a tripod and plentiful ammunition, the machine gun was depended upon when artillery was unavailable. Firing in rocky terrain was easier to spot and correct than on the flat, but targets needed to be carefully chosen as ammunition was seldom plentiful. Because of issues with visibility, each *Gebirgs-Kompanie* was allocated one *sMG-Gruppe*; for good coordination with the infantry, it could be placed at the front of the column, but deployment further back meant the machine guns could fire over the heads of the infantry and cover an attack if it were thrown back or counter-attacked in the flank. In defence, the machine guns were good at delaying a pursuit. Crews were taught how to economize on ammunition and identify the most important targets because of the difficulties of resupply.

Artillery could be deployed as individual pieces, and was rarely fired in batteries because of the limited space for deployment and the difficulties of fire control. Artillerymen would be sent out to determine approach routes, gun positions and observation areas. Emplacing guns and resupplying ammunition took time. Liaison with the force commander was essential. Because of the terrain, individual guns could be concealed to cover a flank, but the prevalence of dead ground meant that heavy infantry weapons took the place of artillery on many occasions.



In the mountains, artillery had to be robust, portable and capable of high-trajectory fire. Offering a range of 8,250m, the Skoda-designed 7.5cm GebK 15 was the standard mountain gun; weighing 613kg, it was capable of being broken down into six horse- or mule-loads or, with gun shield, seven loads. The weapon was small and could be quickly repositioned when firing revealed its location. Firing a shell up to 3,550m, the 7.5cm leGebIG 18 was a split-trail howitzer version that weighed 400kg and could be split into ten parts for transport by mules. The German firm Rheinmetall designed a replacement, entering service in 1938: offering a range of 9,250m and weighing 750kg, the 7.5cm GebG 36 featured a split trail, enabling the weapon to fire as a howitzer at elevations of up to 70°.

Gebirgsjäger recruits undertook basic military training for six months followed by a year in the mountains learning skills such as rock climbing, abseiling, map reading, survival skills and skiing. High standards of fitness were prioritized, while parades, drill and inspections were less important. The intention was to train the soldier to operate in hostile environments. A succession of increasingly difficult graded walks were undertaken that met minimum safety standards before moving on to more difficult climbs. Following mountain trails, troops led by the platoon or company commander, moved in single file with no straggling or bunching. Training in rock climbing (scrambling through rock formations) was mandatory, and some personnel (usually NCOs) were given more advanced training with ropes, pitons and links. Self-sufficiency in hostile environments was emphasized. *Zeltbahn* shelter-quarters were carried that could be placed together to form larger field tents. The ability to set them up quickly was essential to survival, especially in freezing temperatures. When more time was available, wooden cabins were built.

The *Gebirgs-Artillerie-Regiment* comprised one 10.5cm battery and three 7.5cm batteries of mountain guns; if the division was expected to operate in the flat, however, then field artillery was incorporated into the regiment. Here, gunners prepare to fire an unidentified heavy gun in the northern Arctic. (Photo by Martin Sachse/ullstein bild via Getty Images)



Unlike field artillery, heavy mountain guns, including the World War I-era Skoda 10.5cm Gebirgshaubitze(t), could be broken down into three cart-loads, and the more modern Austrian 10.5cm Gebirgshaubitze 40, weighing 1,660kg, into five loads for transport by mules and four loads for carts or *Kettenkrad* tracked motorcycles. Range for the Gebirgshaubitze 40 was 12,625m. Here, an unidentified heavy-artillery piece is shown with horse-drawn transport. (Author's Collection)

Training in battle tactics emphasized the control of elevations to interdict an enemy moving in a valley, and attacking downhill, if necessary without artillery support. Emphasis was placed on combat reconnaissance to find the best movement routes and positions to locate heavy weapons. Surprise was essential for a successful attack. Difficult terrain offered a better opportunity for surprise than easier ground, but attackers would be more vulnerable the nearer they approached an enemy line. If an attack was stopped close to the enemy the attackers, perhaps exhausted and without heavy weapons in proper positions, were vulnerable. Reserves were to follow on closely in the best available cover, ready to exploit any success.

In a defensive posture, if defence in depth was not achieved because of the breadth of the front, mountain troops were advised to use a reserve and hide machine guns on a flank that would open fire when the enemy was close. If there were sufficient forces for a defence in depth and forward outposts were vulnerable to artillery fire, these positions could be weakened and the main force supported by heavy weapons held back to launch a counter-attack. Detailed knowledge of the terrain was deemed to be a vital prerequisite for success.

The *Gebirgs-Panzerjäger-Kompanie* was responsible for defence against tanks and the commander needed to be able to direct the building of obstacles; sometimes *Pioniere* (combat engineers) were attached for this purpose. Manhandling anti-tank guns up slopes over short distances was expected and the company would normally deploy by platoon. An LMG would accompany each gun and set up behind the obstacle. Rather than relying upon towed anti-tank guns, by October 1944 emphasis was placed upon close-range, *Panzerschreck* hand-held rocket launchers that fired hollow-charge projectiles to an effective range of 180m and could penetrate 230mm of armour at a 90° impact angle. They were also equipped with the short-range, hand-held, single-shot, recoilless *Panzerfaust*, which fired a High-Explosive Anti-Tank (HEAT) round to a range of 80m and was capable of penetrating 200mm of armour. Both weapons produced a back blast that endangered anyone standing up to 10m behind the weapon and betrayed the location of the firer.

COMMAND, CONTROL AND COMMUNICATIONS

Soviet

On 10 September 1941, the 12th Naval Infantry Brigade (commander, Colonel V.V. Rassokhin; commissar, I.N. Kirillov) was formed at Arkhangel'sk. Golovko ordered his Naval Reconnaissance Unit to provide the brigade with 80–90 combat-experienced personnel for lower-level leadership positions. When the Germans were within 50km of the main naval base at Poliarnyi, he committed the brigade and in December the formation fought for 12 days near Hill 258.3 in bitter cold. They had no skis and the deep snow exhausted the men. Despite this, they occupied the hill on 2 January 1942, following heavy fighting. Amphibious raids into the enemy's rear would also be carried out, the largest in April 1942 as part of the Soviet spring offensive. To assist coordination, the battalion staff had a signals platoon of two telephone sections, a radio section and a scout platoon (one officer, five NCOs and 24 men in two squads).

Commissars encouraged naval infantry to join the Communist Party and daily indoctrination in patriotism, military duty and comradeship occurred through lectures, reports, political discussions, political briefings, question-and-answer evenings and discussion. During meetings of the Communist Party and Komsomol, troops discussed the results of combat, both successes and mistakes, including the study and dissemination of lessons learnt from other assault-landing operations. They also prepared individual personnel for specific roles and rehearsed their parts in the operation. During battle, Party and Komsomol members could be made responsible for the steadfastness of a certain group of soldiers located with them and rewarded with a special task. In October 1944, a company commander in the 12th Naval Infantry Brigade handed the best soldier a red flag to unfurl on the summit of the hill the formation would be attacking.

Each commissar also had a combat role during the assault, usually as a platoon commander. On the night of 11/12 September 1942, 300 men of

L.I. Brezhnev, the deputy chief of the political directorate of the Black Sea Group, stated how 'Assault groups were trained ... to jump into the water with machine guns, to climb cliffs and to throw grenades from inconvenient positions. The soldiers learned to use all forms of captured weapons, and they learned how to throw knives, use rifle butts in hand-to-hand combat, dress wounds and stop bleeding ... without these skills, the daring assault landing operation and especially the very first night engagement would have been unimaginable' (quoted in Kamalov 1966: 110). Here, naval infantry use the DP-27 LMG and SVT-40 semi-automatic rifle. (Photo by TASS via Getty Images)





The reconnaissance detachment used boats with muffled oars launched from patrol vessels to get ashore. Leonov stressed how 'The dream of a perfect scout always was, and always will be, quiet. Perfect quiet' (Leonov 1993: 82). In August 1941, the detachment was strafed at sea while returning from a landing at Cape Pikshuev, resulting in 38 casualties. (Nik Cornish at www.stavka.org.uk)

the 12th Naval Infantry Brigade under Major A.P. Borovikov, the commander of the 125th Naval Infantry Regiment, carried out a night-raid on Cape Pikshuev. The Germans suffered 190 casualties in the fighting. Enlisted privates P.A. Grebeshkov and D.D. Sulirnov destroyed two pillboxes and an ammunition dump. Commissar V.D. Isayev, who took charge of two platoons immediately following the landing, died in the attack.

Some leaders were more popular than others and decisions taken by those of the Northern Fleet's reconnaissance detachment (named the 181st Special Reconnaissance Detachment) would have particular ramifications. From September 1942 a new commander, Senior Lieutenant Frolov, was appointed because Dobrotin and Inzartsev had departed for other assignments. Warrant Officer 1st Class Makar Babikov recalled how 'he used to talk and sometimes to invent stories and exaggerate. His stories did not sit well with veterans in the detachment' (quoted in Leonov 1993: 184). Several men requested transfers, some to the naval infantry. When 50 men of the unit and two companies of naval infantry landed west of Cape Pikshuev to attack coastal defences on Cape Mogil'nyi, the consequences of poor decision-making were evident. The landing was opposed, and contact was soon lost with one of the naval infantry companies. The other naval infantry company commander, Captain V.S. Buyanov, ordered his men to carry on with the approach march, but he soon found that they were behind the reconnaissance troops and with the new day dawning, decided to return to the landing site. He was later court-martialled. Frolov pressed on regardless, and though a strongpoint at Cape Mogil'nyi was captured, German reinforcements soon arrived. Frolov and Commissar Dubrovskiy were wounded; Leonov, who was an NCO at the time, was cut off with his section, but managed to escape.

Lessons were learnt and with experience the Soviets proved they could put together an effective all-arms team that reflected the demands of the mission. In September 1944, the 195-strong raiding force ordered to capture the Cape Krestovyi coastal battery comprised the reconnaissance detachment of the NDR, commanded by Captain I.P. Barchenko-Emel'ianov, and the Northern Fleet's reconnaissance detachment. Barchenko-Emel'ianov, the overall commander, was an experienced naval infantryman who had served in reconnaissance units of the 12th Naval Infantry Brigade since November 1941. M. Sanin was his commissar and Lieutenant V. Pivovarov, Lieutenant A. Kubarev and Senior Lieutenant A. Sintsov his platoon commanders. Leonov's unit comprised 95 men and some artillerymen, combat engineers, medics and radio operators were attached.

German

In *Gebirgsjäger* units the battalion, rather than the regiment, was expected to carry out independent operations, suitably reinforced by artillery and support troops. The battalion commander needed to understand terrain difficulties in order to coordinate the movements of his troops. To achieve surprise, the commander was expected to lead his men at night and provide adequate reconnaissance. Approaches were identified and the commander worked out the best way to exploit them. In an attack, deploying heavy weapons and deciding how they would move forward was essential; in defence, siting them effectively and the disposition of reserves were his primary responsibilities. He would also command the artillery assigned to him and use signals equipment to coordinate fires. Centralized fire control was the aim, but mountainous terrain frequently necessitated separation of assets. If an attack was successful, observing follow-on targets and maintaining communication could be a problem. Even in defence, similar difficulties emerged, and in October 1944 Major Hans Ruef, battalion commander of III./GJR 143, would complain

A *Gebirgsjäger* battalion commander would command the artillery designated to support his unit and used signals equipment to coordinate fires. Here, a *Gebirgsjäger* officer with a specialist Zeiss scissors-telescope acts as an artillery observer with a radio by his side. (Author's Collection)





Germans lay wire cable in the northern Arctic. When laid on loose snow, telephone cable frequently broke and needed replacing following a heavy snowfall, and therefore would be raised either on natural high supports or, where these were not available, 90cm-high wooden tripods that could be pulled up following a snowfall. (Photo by ullstein bild/ullstein bild via Getty Images)

that radios were not working. Liaison officers were used instead, even though artillery officers objected strongly to this arrangement.

In mountainous terrain, a change of plan once an attack started or altering defensive responses could take time. Coordination of unit elements was difficult and signals equipment from the battalion accompanied the company commander and both the machine-gun and infantry-gun platoons. The Torn Fu d2 had a three-man team and was carried in two loads, one comprised of the transmitter/receiver unit and the other, the battery power box. Range was 3.2km for voice and 16km for Morse. Telefunken pedal generators could be used. In 1943, one-man pack radios, the Feldfu c and Feldfu b, were introduced.

As the terrain was not usually observable from one position and there could be issues with radio communication, the influence of platoon rather than company commanders assumed more prominence. Platoon commanders were also allowed more initiative because deploying the entire company for one objective was unusual. Those destined to be NCOs were soon identified. *Heeresbergführer* (Army mountain guide) qualification was needed for many NCO appointments. They were trained as rope leaders, given specialist ski training, were very proficient climbers and were expected to lead assault troops across high mountain terrain to make an unexpected approach.

Higher headquarters used standard infantry signals equipment adapted for carriage on mules. Mules or men on skis could lay cables for telephones. Semaphore signalling could also be used in steep terrain as radios were unreliable in the mountains. Blinker stations were established to relay light signals (though these were weather-dependent) and heliographs whereby light was reflected from a mirror were also employed to communicate pre-arranged signals in the mountains. Messenger dogs and carrier pigeons were also used.

Motovskiy Bay

28 April–13 May 1942

BACKGROUND TO BATTLE

In June 1941, Dietl had 2. and 3. Gebirgs-Divisionen at his disposal to capture Murmansk. He planned for 2. Gebirgs-Division to move along the coast via Titovka, Bolshaya Zapadnaya Litsa Bay and Ura Guba to Poliarnyi, and 3. Gebirgs-Division to head inland via Motovka. One battalion would seal off the Rybachiy Peninsula (in fact two would be needed) before moving to the Litsa River. 3. Gebirgs-Division soon found there were no roads inland and had to make for the coast to ensure resupply. A German attack across the Litsa River was planned for 6 July, but an amphibious assault conducted that day by the 102nd Rifle Regiment at Bolshaya Zapadnaya prompted the Germans to withdraw because the landing threatened their flank. Two days later, another 500 Soviet troops landed near Andreyev Bay. On 13 July, another German attack over the river began. In response, the next day the Soviets landed a regiment (commanded by Battalion Commissar A. Shikit) from the 325th Rifle Division in Litsa Bay; 700 volunteer naval infantrymen followed. Partly as a result, on 18 July the German bridgehead over the Litsa River was again reduced to guarantee the coastal flank. Shikit was ashore for three weeks until, attacked by superior enemy forces and not possessing any artillery (he had only one gun and a few mortars), his men transferred to the east shore on 3 August. From such hardy individuals emerged 'a nucleus of marine infantry which soon won for itself well-merited fame for its steadiness and valour in bitter fighting' (Golovko 1965: 51).

Dietl committed to the attack a regiment that was needed to haul supplies. He said a division's worth of reinforcements was required to proceed. Two regiments (Infanterie-Regiment 388 and SS-Infanterie-Regiment 9) were brought up from the south and the transfer of 6. Gebirgs-Division was set in



Two views of *Gebirgsjäger* in Motovskiy Bay. In 1941, German attention soon turned to their coastal flank. The Soviet Navy was soon committed to amphibious operations as German destroyers at Kirkenes were not close enough or strong enough to interdict Soviet transports. On 30 June, a day after the German offensive began, Soviet reinforcements landed at Kutovaya in Motovskiy Bay, shown here, before retreating to the slopes of the Musta Ridge astride the Srednyi Isthmus. The defenders had to deal with naval bombardment from the destroyers *Valerian Kuibyshev* and *Uritsky*. Observers with radios indicated targets and corrected the landing of shells. (Author's Collection)

motion. Murmansk was still the objective, but interdicting the railway line heading south would have achieved his strategic aim. The Germans hoped to envelop the Soviet defences, but Dietl argued that the terrain would not allow rapid movement of troops around the flank. The German attack started on 8 September, but the two inexperienced regiments suffered heavy losses. Ammunition, brought up by pack animals, soon ran low. The sea routes to Petsamo were also attacked by Soviet forces and Axis freighters were sunk. By October, with the offensive stalled, 6. Gebirgs-Division arrived to replace 3. Gebirgs-Division.

In early 1942, the Soviets intended to launch a spring offensive before the thaw set in so that when it did, German counter-attacks would be hampered. In April, a Soviet landing on Cape Pikshuev was intended to cut off the retreat of 6. Gebirgs-Division's *Gebirgsjäger*-Regiment 143, which would simultaneously be attacked by the 10th Guards Rifle Division on the Litsa. In two days, the Red Army offensive penetrated 2–3km before a German counter-attack on the third day ended the Soviet attack. The 152nd Rifle Division was moved up to the front, but the deteriorating weather would restrict their offensive potential. Kabanov described how although the frontal offensive stalled, 'collapsing the whole concept of the operation', the order to the naval infantry brigade to launch an amphibious assault was not rescinded and 'it is necessary to perform the previous task' (Kabanov 1977: 39). On 21–22 February, three Soviet battalions had practised landings in the Kola Peninsula. The assault was planned for 21 April, but an unexpected thaw led to a postponement until 28 April. To maintain the element of surprise, the landing would be conducted during the twilight hours without preliminary air and artillery preparation. Air reconnaissance had photographed the coast



and four battalions would land simultaneously in two echelons in Sayda, Vayenga, Tyuva and Tri Ruchya bays on a 6km-long front. Air support and naval bombardment from surface ships and coastal artillery were available. In expectation of improving weather, the men were not issued with warm clothing, mostly wearing cotton jackets and trousers, warm underwear, a rain cape and boots obtained via US Lend-Lease that were not waterproof and would freeze.

During the amphibious assault, the 6,065 men of the 12th Naval Infantry Brigade were equipped with 3,356 assault rifles, 808 rifles and carbines, 146 anti-tank rifles, 99 HMGs, ten 12.7mm anti-aircraft guns, 55 LMGs, 76 50mm–82mm mortars and seven 45mm anti-tank guns. The Soviet forces were ordered to annihilate enemy troops defending the coast, and then, advancing in the direction of Zapadnaya Litsa, assist ground troops. The planners allowed for ten days' logistical support, but as it transpired the brigade would operate for 15 days. Every infantryman carried a 25kg load, including 200 rounds of ammunition, four hand grenades and five days' dry rations. Another five days' rations and half a load of ammunition were immediately available. Some sailors were ammunition carriers for the heavy weapons; 3,000 rounds were issued to ten men made responsible for each MMG, 1,500 rounds for each LMG, and 20 mortar shells for each mortar. The brigade also possessed 50 reindeer teams to evacuate casualties.

ABOVE LEFT

Hill 70 emerged from the mountain ridge that ran along Litsa Bay like a bar. It offered the naval infantry ideal opportunities for observation, and was a jumping-off area for further attacks and for the defence of supply bases in the landing bay. Here, on the banks of the Titovka River, a similar hill rises from the fjord. (Author's Collection)

ABOVE RIGHT

An MG 34 machine gun is set up on a small hill in the northern Arctic with a good line of sight over the valley ahead. Reconnaissance to find the best locations to site machine guns was essential. *Pioniere* (combat engineers) with entrenching tools would be attached to build firing positions. (Author's Collection)

Motovskiy Bay, 28 April–13 May 1942

MAP KEY

1 0800hrs, 28 April: The 12th Naval Infantry Brigade makes landings simultaneously at four points in Sayda, Vayenga, Tyuva and Tri Ruchya bays in two echelons on a 6km-long front.

2 1 May: Oberst Treeck arrives at Seenenge and orders the setting-up of various battle groups, including KG *Raithel*, which is based on his II./GJR 143.

3 2 May: Obersteiner Hill, defended by Wachtmeister Johann Schmölzer of I./RadfBtl 68, is captured by the 2nd Battalion, 12th Naval Infantry Brigade.

4 0400hrs, 3 May: Major Raithel forms his various platoons into the following units: 8./GJR 143; Schober Kompanie (baggage platoons of II. and III./GJR 143, and a platoon of 15./GJR 141); Oberfeldwebel Traber's *sMG-Zug* and *Granatwerfer-Gruppe*; 3./GebPiBtl 91, under Leutnant Lamprecht; the GebPiBtl 91 baggage train, under Leutnant Karrer; and a reserve, under Leutnant Heel.

5 1800hrs, 3 May: Raithel issues his orders for the capture of Hill 70. Traber is to pin down the enemy while Lamprecht is to make his way forward to divert enemy attention from the main attack planned in the south by 8./GJR 143. The attack will commence at 0200hrs.

6 0300hrs, 4 May: 8./GJR 143 has advanced up Hill 70. 1. Zug (Leutnant Nitsch) reaches the summit and ambushes

some Soviet troops, but is fired upon and Nitsch is wounded. 2. Zug (Feldwebel Wischerop) and 3. Zug (Feldwebel Meuth) are targeted by artillery further down the slope. Gefreiter Goldner and his *Gruppe* remain on the summit.

7 0400hrs, 4 May: Raithel tells Heel that the attack has stalled and orders him to assume command of 8./GJR 143. Heel is wounded as he attempts to reach the company.

8 0500hrs, 4 May: Leutnant Dewitz reaches Goldner and makes a reconnaissance. He reports back to Raithel, who gives him elements of Schober's contingent to make an unsighted approach through a hollow. Upon returning to the summit at c.0530hrs, Dewitz and Goldner ambush a group of Soviet naval infantry preparing for a counter-attack.

9 1000hrs, 4 May: The German advance to Hill 100 is bogged down and Raithel withdraws.

10 5 May: KG *Raithel* seizes Hill 172.3.

11 5 May: KG *Maunz* attacks Herzogstein.

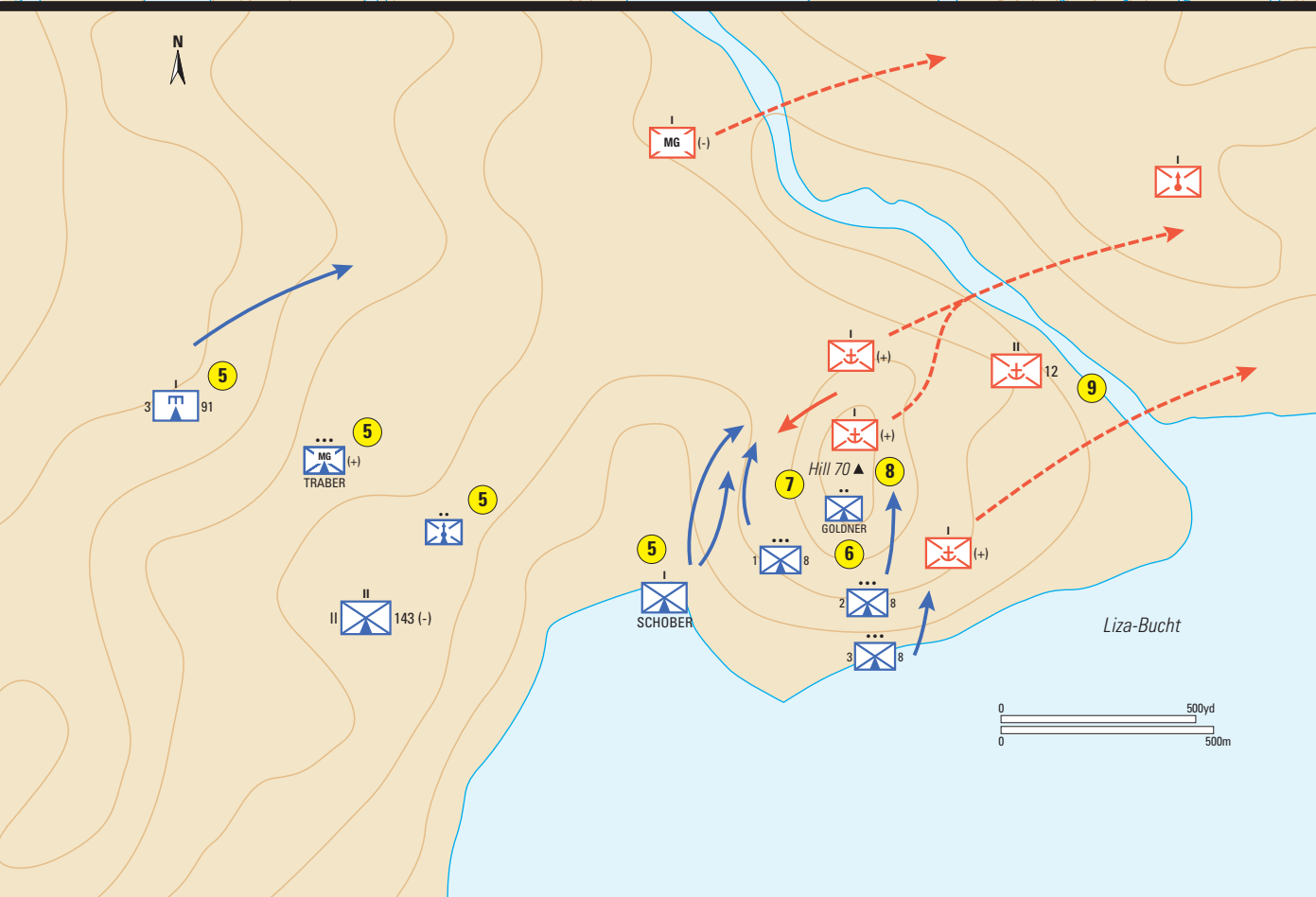
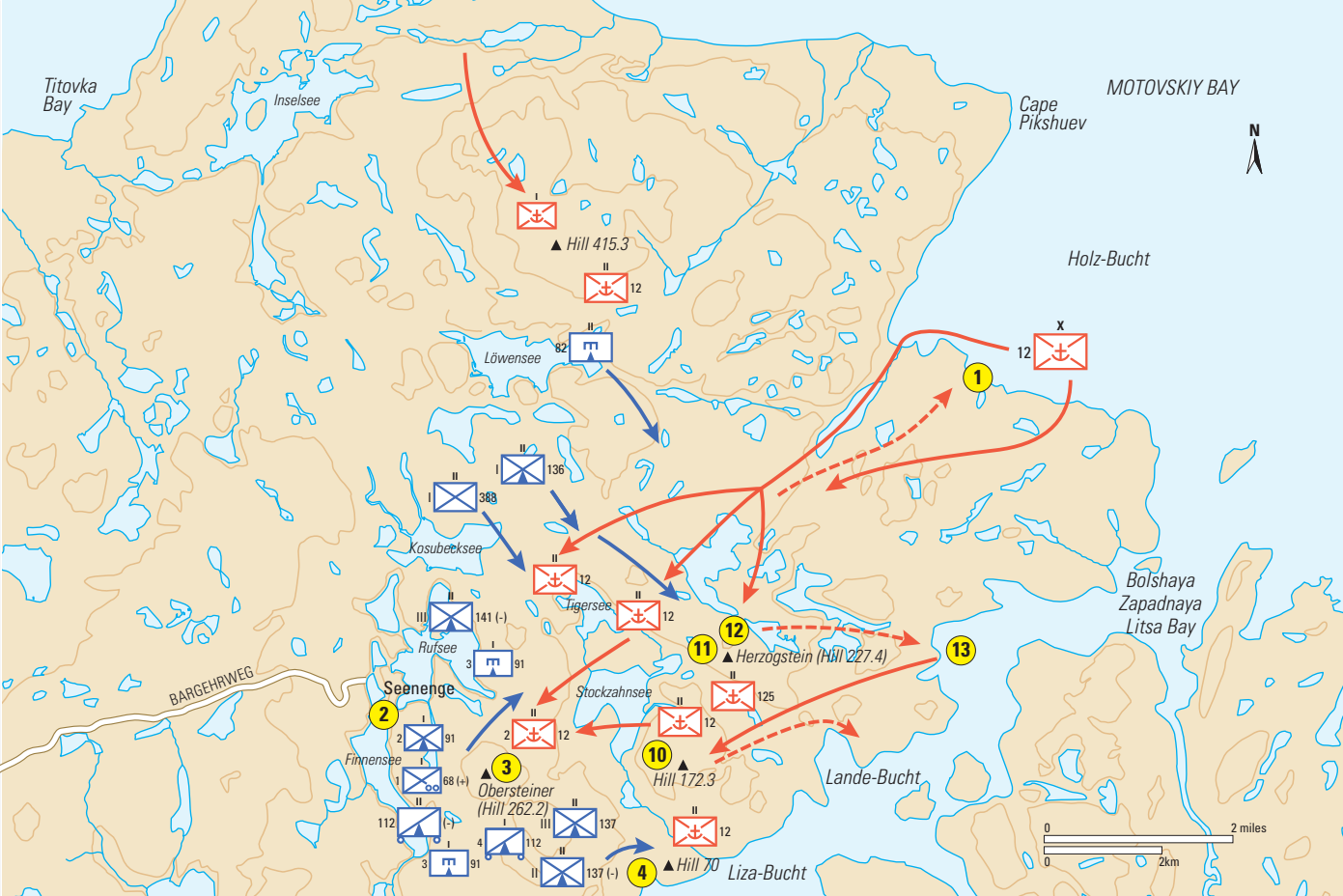
12 10 May: The Soviets, with the support of a battalion from the 125th Naval Infantry Regiment, attack Herzogstein, but are repelled.

13 13 May: The 12th Naval Infantry Brigade is evacuated across Litsa Bay.

Battlefield environment

The daytime temperature in early May 1942 was around 0°C. The weather was overcast, with thick snow in the morning that during the day melted on the heights, but not on low ground. A snowstorm that descended on 4 May would severely hamper operations, and falling snow would reduce visibility. There was no symmetry to the landscape as instead of forming chains, the mountains rose up irregularly; in between lay bogs, lakes and piles of rock. Ponds in the day froze over at night. Of 70 men

of the Naval Reconnaissance Unit, only ten would avoid cold exposure, though only four casualties were to enemy action. This was despite the fact that – unlike the naval infantry – they wore reindeer-fur outer garments. The 12th Naval Infantry Brigade was even worse off. There was no cover on the hilltops from the wind, but at least small hillocks and summits aided the Soviet defence, and friendly artillery on the other side of Litsa Bay had a good line of sight across the fjord.



INTO COMBAT

At 0800hrs on 28 April the Soviet attack started, and by the end of the day a beachhead 7km wide and 5km (in some areas 11km) deep had been captured. Two more Soviet battalions would land and reinforce the brigade. The seven battalions, commanded by V.N. Semenenko, K.P. Nezhentsev, Ya.A. Fomchenko, A.F. Petrov, F.I. Khizhnykov and Yeo S. Kozyur, moved forward. The Germans had built a system of defensive positions that were 2–3km apart from each other. Soviet intelligence was poor and a broad advance was adopted as a result. The brigade's reconnaissance detachment (commander, Senior Lieutenant N.I. Grachev; commissar, Senior Political Instructor I.V. Sazonov) soon entered into combat with elements of Radfahr-Bataillon 68 (6. Gebirgs-Division). By 1 May, having advanced some 15–18km, progress by the 12th Naval Infantry Brigade stalled. Over four days, Soviet losses were 175 men killed, 357 wounded and nine missing. Meanwhile, to divert Axis troops from the main assault force, an assault landing by the fleet's reconnaissance detachment occurred 10km west of the brigade's landing sector.

The Germans reacted quickly to the Soviet landing. On 1 May, Oberst Egon Treeck from 2. Gebirgs-Division arrived at Seenenge to assume command in the sector. Major Helmuth Raithel, the commander of II./GJR 143, had 8./GJR 143 returned to him; since 9 April the company had been 5km behind the lines in Base Camp *Tirol*, where they were enjoying some rest and recuperation in an environment that was 'like an oasis in a hopeless desert' (Ruef 1989: 226). Raithel reported to Treeck at 1800hrs and was ordered to form a *Kampfgruppe* (KG; battle group) incorporating the staff of his battalion, a reinforced 8./GJR 143, *Züge* formed from the baggage trains of II. and III./GJR 143, elements of 15./GJR 141, the remnants of 3./GebPiBtl 91 and parts of that battalion's baggage train. All these units were located south of Obersteiner Hill.

Along with Major Raithel's mixed battle group, the following units were at Treeck's disposal: Major Hermann Rath with the weakened III./GJR 141 and 3./GebPiBtl 91 close to Litsa Bay; Major Kuno Walleser with III./GJR 137 and 4./AufklAbt 112; Oberleutnant Loibner with elements of Radfahr-Bataillon 68 and 2./GebFErsBtl 91 on the Obersteiner and Schober Heights; Major Wörtz with two squadrons of Aufklärungs-Abteilung 112 and 2./GebPiBtl 91 between the lakes the Germans called Rufsee and Kosubecksee; Hauptmann Peters with I./IR 388; and Hauptmann Maunz with I./GJR 136. Major Bargehr, who would be killed by a sniper while directing the fire of his battery from the front, was with 4./GAR 111 and 2./GAR 111 providing fire support. Some units incorporated maintenance personnel and lorry drivers who were not used to combat.

The Germans planned an attack towards the heights by Litsa Bay to recover territory towards Lande-Bucht ('Landing Bay'). On 2 May there was a setback before the German counter-attack could be launched, when the 2nd Battalion, 12th Naval Infantry Brigade with mortar and naval bombardment support captured Obersteiner Hill, decisive for the conduct of the battle in the north. Wachtmeister Johann Schmölzer, with his platoon from 1./RadfBtl 68 supported by two platoons from Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 137, a platoon from Gebirgs-Pionier-Bataillon 91 and an *sMG-Zug*, recaptured Obersteiner Hill. Schmölzer was awarded the Knight's Cross.



On 28 April, a headquarters group and two platoons of the Northern Fleet's Naval Reconnaissance Unit landed at Cape Mogil'nyi. The scouts moved inland to Hill 415.3, but were soon surrounded by *Gebirgsjäger*, 12 German attacks were repulsed. A naval infantry battalion was observed 3–4km away, but Inzartsev, deputy commander of the unit, only had an abbreviated list of code words and with ammunition running low, sent Leonov and two men to ask for help. Here, the northern Arctic shore near Cape Mogil'nyi is visible. (Author's Collection)

Raithel was given the task of capturing Hill 70 and Hill 172.3. At 0400hrs on 3 May he formed the baggage platoons and a platoon from 15./GJR 141 into a *Kompanie* under Leutnant Schober. Oberfeldwebel Traber was given an HMG platoon and mortar section. 3./GebPiBtl 91, commanded by Leutnant Lamprecht, was reinforced by an HMG and mortar. Leutnant Karrer commanded the baggage train of Gebirgs-Pionier-Bataillon 91. Leutnant Heel led a small reserve. Total strength was ten officers, 55 NCOs and 400 men. Along with rifles they were equipped with 28 SMGs, 23 LMGs, five HMGs, two 5cm mortars and five 8cm mortars. These movements did not escape the attention of Soviet artillery observers on the south shore of Litsa Bay.

At 1800hrs on 3 May, Raithel issued orders to advance towards Hill 172.3. The key terrain feature would be Hill 70, which had already changed hands several times. Reconnaissance gave the Germans no clear picture of the defences, but on the highest point a stone bunker was observed. Strongly occupied positions were expected. A hollow was located in the north-west and a ridge running down to the east threatened the approach of the attack force to



The importance of launching rapid counter-attacks and closing with the enemy in close combat was shown by Wachtmeister Johann Schmölzer of 1./RadfBtl 68. Accompanied by soldiers who knew the terrain, Schmölzer reached the upper south-west slopes of the Munsdorf Height 800m to the south of the important Obersteiner Hill. Soviet reinforcements arrived to the east, but the Germans took the hill in close combat. Grenades were particularly effective; here, a German raiding party ensure they have enough before setting off. (Author's Collection)

The battle group departed the assembly area at 0200hrs on 4 May when, according to Goldner, 'Apart from grenade detonations from the Russian artillery behind us and our own in front of us, no shots were fired'; Goldner's section was halfway up the hill 'from where I had good sight into a hollow running away to the left before the last rise of the hill and onto the ridge running parallel to the bay' (quoted in Ruef 1989: 230). Goldner waited for Burger and with binoculars observed 50–60 rifle barrels behind him to the left. He reported his sighting to the company commander, who identified them as Soviet troops waiting in ambush. Burger ordered 'all machine guns of 2. and 3. *Züge* in position. Fire at recognised targets to the left. 1. *Zug* from the water's edge climb to the top of the steep escarpment to the southern crest of Hill 70 and from there roll up enemy position' (quoted in Ruef 1989: 231). Goldner, who was ordered with his marksmen to get to the top with 1. *Zug*, described how 'Apart from physical exertion there were no problems. We were completely out of sight, the marines were not expecting any attack from this side. Who would be able to get to the top of these steep slopes? That was certainly their opinion' (quoted in Ruef 1989: 231).

When the first *Gebirgsjäger* jumped over the topmost rocks and opened fire on the surprised defenders, 'The Russians lying in ambush saw that we were breaking into their left flank from the bay side. They fired all barrels at 2. and 3. *Züge*. Even their artillery on the other side of Litza Bay went fully into action' (quoted in Ruef 1989: 231). Sixteen men were killed, including Burger and Wischerop. Eighteen men were wounded, including Leutnant

the south of Hill 70. Traber was ordered to pin down the enemy while Lamprecht diverted Soviet attention from the main focus of the main attack in the south.

Gefreiter Wilhelm Goldner was a section leader in 8./GJR 143 and described how:

Leutnant Burger inserted the Kompanie as follows: the 1. *Zug* with Leutnant Nitsch to the far right towards the water where the terrain fell away more strongly and so an advance under cover was a good possibility. Slightly above them I moved with the Company troop and the group of marksmen towards the southern foot of Hill 70, that is to say we jumped from snow crater to snow crater dodging our own and the enemy's artillery. Behind us followed the Leutnant [Burger] with the second *Zug* led by Feldwebel Wischerop. The third *Zug* with Feldwebel Meuth had the task in rapid advance of building and maintaining a protective screen against surprise enemy assault. (Quoted in Ruef 1989: 230)



Nitsch. Goldner, on the summit with ten men, fired 'with the marksmen rifles, a captured machine gun and a grenade launcher at the Russians on the flank of 8. Kompanie. The range was about 200 metres. Numerous rocks served as firing positions and cover'; a message from Raithel ordered him to assume command and hold the high ground as all the officers of his company were out of action. He tried to establish contact with the other platoons and drew back to give orders personally in order to organize 'the defence on the south summit against the expected counter attacks. On the northern corner we observed how the Soviets were concentrating there and had no intentions of surrendering' (quoted in Ruef 1989: 231).

Raithel told Leutnant Heel that the attack had stalled and ordered him to assume command of the company. He briefed Heel that the southern foot of Hill 70 was secure, but the Soviets 'have strongly built up the rear slope. They are grimly defending every metre of ground' (quoted in Ruef 1989: 233). In the diversionary force, Lamprecht was wounded (Leutnant Turnherr assumed command) and his men were pinned down in birch hollows west of Hill 70 by flanking fire from Soviet positions to the north. Raithel also told Heel 'my adjutant, Leutnant Dewitz is currently reconnoitring personally the chances of sending shock troops into the main Russian position on the NE slope' (quoted in Ruef 1989: 233).

At about 0500hrs, Heel found four men dug in on the south-west slope of Hill 70. A *Gefreiter* went with him and, peering over a bank, spotted two Soviet machine guns. An MG 34 team could not target them and so Heel moved the machine-gunners into a better position. Then he told his men to prepare grenades in their belts and check ammunition. With cover from the MG 34, they moved 250m towards the Soviet machine guns. The German party crept to within 30m before throwing grenades and then stormed in,

On Hill 415.3 one morning, Leonov 'noticed mounds of rock. Then, as one of our sailors was running towards me, a short machine-gun burst from nearby cut him down. I noticed that the firing was from one of the mounds ... Instinctively I flinched ... only one bullet, ricocheting off a rock, hit me ... protruding into my mouth' (Leonov 1993: 52). The Germans had infiltrated at night and covered themselves with ponchos. They ran away when a Soviet sniper targeted them. Here, a Soviet raiding party equipped with SVT-40 semi-automatic rifles consolidates after landing in the Arctic. (Photo by: Sovfoto/UiG via Getty Images)



The naval infantrymen held back numerically superior German troops for two weeks, repelling up to ten attacks per day. Here, naval infantry move amid northern Arctic hills in 1942. (Photo by TASS via Getty Images)

destroying the weapons with further grenades. Instead of reconnoitring an approach up the slope, however, Heel thought he needed to lead an attack against another position. Near a ridge, a flurry of snow hit him, and when he wiped his eyes he observed a Soviet soldier approaching 20m away. He fired his MP 40, but after two shots the gun jammed. Heel turned to run, but heard a bang and was hit. He thought it was all over, and held the rosary a priest in France had given him.

Meanwhile, Traber had his machine-gun platoon and mortar section 600m to the west of Hill 70. Dr Kappal, attached to Raithel's unit, dealt with the wounded. Karrer's men helped to evacuate them. Heel was found and taken to the Finnish hospital in Parkkina. Turnherr reported to Raithel that plans to advance his company on the northern slopes were impractical because Major Walleser's battalion was not on the flank.

Goldner was defending the southern part of Hill 70 and using captured grenades against the Soviet forces on the eastern slope. Dewitz reached him and jumped from rock to rock on the eastern slopes under covering fire. He then ran back, told Goldner to hold position until he could bring reinforcements, and ran down the southern slope where he met Raithel. Dewitz reported 'I have reconnoitred myself and found the gap through which the Russians could be beaten. I need a group. But we have to be quick. I'll lead it myself' (quoted in Ruef 1984: 337). He told Raithel, 'the important thing is that

the artillery and the heavy infantry weapons keep the Russians down on the northern top and further up' (quoted in Ruef 1989: 237–38). Raithel ordered up a group of Schober's contingent. Dewitz led it on and 'tolerated no hanging back, he was determined on shock attack' (Ruef 1984: 337). Accompanied by an artillery observer, Raithel set up an observation position with telephone and radio equipment.

Dewitz returned to Goldner, explained the situation, and ordered Goldner to follow him over the ridge. Dewitz crawled forward and when he reached a position where he was going to roll through a gully into a hollow, he noticed Soviet troops down below preparing for an assault. He stood up, fired his MP 40 and ordered soldiers with him to throw grenades. The firefight was short and one-sided. The Soviets lost 60 dead, 12 prisoners, five HMGs, one heavy mortar, one light mortar, 22 automatic rifles, one SMG and a field telephone. A captured map belonging to an artillery observer had German positions marked upon it.

Raithel was moving up the hill with reinforcements. At 0700hrs, with Hill 70 secure, he ordered Dewitz to move against another hill 800m away on the other side of a valley before moving north-east to Hill 100. Schober was to move north under the cover of the western slope of Hill 70. Together with Turnherr they would secure the left flank against Soviet forces near Hill 172.3 or the lake the Germans called Stockzahnsee. Traber would pin down the Soviet heavy weapons. Raithel would be 500m north of Hill 70. Warmer air had caused the 1m-deep snow in the valley to loosen, however. Men sank into the snow and progress was slow. At 1000hrs, the right-hand company advanced to the bed of the stream that flowed from Stockzahnsee around the foot of Hill 100, but on the other flank the company was not in position north of Hill 70 until 1200hrs. Soviet naval infantry had succeeded in occupying positions with suitable fields of fire and brought up two mortars and eight HMGs to force the Germans back to the stream. Raithel decided an approach to Hill 100 could not be carried out. His men could not remain in the stream as they were easy targets for Soviet snipers. Instead, he withdrew and reinforced Hill 70.

The naval infantry battalion contacted by Leonov received permission from brigade to send a mortar and infantry platoon to the hard-pressed Naval Reconnaissance Unit. Even so, 'with each hour the pressure grew. At times it seemed that the limit of our endurance was reached' (Leonov 1993: 52). With the support of the naval infantry mortars and other supplies, the Soviet forces held the hill until ordered to withdraw on 4 May. Here, Soviet troops move forward carrying 82mm mortars split into three loads. (Courtesy of the Central Museum of the Armed Forces, Moscow via Stavka)







Ambush at Hill 70



Soviet view: This scene depicts the moment at approximately 0530hrs on 4 May, when elements of the 12th Naval Infantry Brigade are ambushed on Hill 70 as they prepare to counter-attack Germans that have established themselves on the summit during the night. The brigade had landed on 28 April, but by 1 May, having advanced some 15–18km, was forced to stop. The weather was initially spring like but a snowstorm that day would dramatically alter the situation. The naval infantry are under fire from a ridgeline and are trying to react to this attack from an unexpected quarter. The soldiers are wearing

different uniforms – most wear the black naval jacket (*bushlat*) with and without a basic-issue rain cape (*plashe patka*), some have the black greatcoat (*shine*), and others *telogreika* winter padded jackets. Issued in the 1920s, the *bushlat* was the most recognizable piece of naval infantry uniform. Underneath, the *rubashka flanelevaya* (meaning ‘flannel shirt’; also referred to as a *flanelevka*) was worn. They are armed with SVT-40 semi-automatic rifles and Mosin-Nagant Model 1891/30 bolt-action rifles, and the officer has a PPSH-41 SMG.



German view: At 0200hrs on 4 May, the *Gebirgsjäger* had assaulted Hill 70. Once the Germans reached the top they opened fire on some surprised defenders but then had to endure heavy return fire and a bombardment that killed the company commander and dispersed most of the company from the summit. With ten men, Gefreiter Goldner held his ground and met up with Leutnant Dewitz, the battalion adjutant, who was reconnoitring where the Soviet defences might be weak. Dewitz went to see the battalion commander, Major Raitzel, and with

reinforcements following behind returned and ordered Goldner's men forwards through a gap he had noticed. Dewitz was about to enter a hollow when he noticed Soviet naval infantry forming up for an attack below. He has immediately opened fire with his MP 40 submachine gun. He is wearing a double-breasted windproof jacket, made from waterproof cotton and designed to be worn over his field blouse. Others wearing reversible anoraks with drawstring waist, drawstring hood and elasticated cuffs, are throwing M24 stick grenades.

A snowstorm descended that limited visibility and the ability to command the troops. The soldiers gathered closer together and built new positions behind boulders to shelter from the wind and cold. On 5 May, Raithel managed to seize Hill 172.3. Wallerer was on the north shore of Stockzahnsee. Wörtz took a hill east of Kosubecksee. Maunz attacked 'Herzogstein' (Hill 227.4). A ring was being drawn around the Soviet naval infantry. On 6 May, two companies from Maunz's group tried but failed to break through to the bay. The weather limited the attack. The Soviets were also forced into inactivity, but an improvement in the weather on 10 May permitted a counter-attack that temporarily threatened Maunz at Herzogstein; the Germans received more reinforcements, however, and with the improving weather the Luftwaffe attacked Soviet ships in the bay. The Soviet forces, running out of food and ammunition, withdrew within days.

The weather had severely hampered the naval infantry's operations. A thaw that made clothing wet had occurred before the cold descended, the wind increased, and a snowstorm blew; according to the 12th Naval Infantry Brigade's records, 986 of its infantrymen were evacuated with injuries caused by the weather. In total the brigade lost 4,992 men (70 per cent of total strength), including 849 killed, 1,828 wounded, 941 missing and 359 ill. The losses to the Germans were heavy, but not as severe. During 1–10 May, Radfahr-Bataillon 68 suffered 195 casualties: one officer, ten NCOs and 23 enlisted killed; five officers, 38 NCOs and 105 enlisted wounded; and two officers and 11 enlisted missing. Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 143 suffered 351 casualties: one officer, nine NCOs and 40 enlisted killed; five officers, 32 NCOs and 253 enlisted wounded; and two NCOs and nine enlisted missing. Gebirgs-Pionier-Bataillon 91 had 162 casualties: two officers, four NCOs and 34 enlisted killed; and two officers, 13 NCOs and 107 enlisted wounded.

The losses to German junior officers were particularly heavy as from October 1941 to 1 October 1942 6. Gebirgs-Division lost 27 ranking as *Leutnant* killed and 61 wounded, of which 17 and 35 respectively were from the two *Gebirgsjäger-Regimenter*, and eight ranking as *Oberleutnant* killed and 18 wounded, of which two and nine were from the *Gebirgsjäger-Regimenter*. The losses to officers of Radfahr-Bataillon 68 were also heavy, with five of *Leutnant* rank killed and eight wounded, and two ranking as *Oberleutnant* wounded. No officer of the rank of *Hauptmann* was killed in the division.

Hitler continued to be worried about Allied amphibious operations, particularly a landing in northern Norway that might cut the supply route to Dietl. The Germans assessed summer offensive operations as unfeasible, but believed it was important to capture the Rybachiy Peninsula. In April, 3. Gebirgs-Division returned for the summer before departing later in the year. In June, 20. Gebirgsarmee was officially formed and ordered to capture the Rybachiy Peninsula (Operation *Wiesengrund*); in July, however, when Dietl was told 5. Gebirgs-Division would not be arriving because it was impractical to supply another combat division in the northern Arctic, the operation was called off. Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OKW: High Command of the Armed Forces) wanted to bring up static formations to hold the line at Litsa to release 2. and 6. Gebirgs-Divisionen for the operation, but Dietl refused to have second-rate troops on the river.

Liinakhamari

12–13 October 1944

BACKGROUND TO BATTLE

On 7 October 1944, 97,000 men of the Soviet Karelian Front commanded by Marshal of the Soviet Union Kirill Meretskov launched an offensive against 56,000 Germans of XIX. Gebirgskorps commanded by General der Gebirgstruppe Ferdinand Jodl to capture the Finnish town of Petsamo and the Norwegian port of Kirkenes. The struggle for control of the road network would dominate the battle. XIX. Gebirgskorps relied on Arctic Highway 50 from Kirkenes. A secondary road went east to Tarnet and Petsamo; spurs went further east to Titovka (Speer Road) and south to the Litsa River (Russian Road) where positions were occupied by 6. Gebirgs-Division with Grenadier-Brigade 388 attached. Another main road originating from Rovaniemi (the Arctic Ocean Highway) went north through Salmijärvi, Nikel, Luostari, Petsamo and Liinakhamari. At Luostari a secondary road (Lanweg) went to the Titovka River where positions were occupied by 2. Gebirgs-Division in front of the river from Lake Chapr to Hill 237.1. Further inland, the terrain was thought to be unsuitable for military operations and no defences existed. The Soviets relied on a single road from Murmansk and gave priority to the construction of roads to join up with the German network, with separate engineer units intended to reinforce divisional engineer battalions. Infantry battalions would also be earmarked for road-building. The German defensive line was not continuous, but based on a series of company- or platoon-strength fortifications on dominating heights. Other defensive belts further back along the Titovka and Petsamo rivers were not yet occupied.

In addition to the two rifle divisions already in the northern Arctic, the Soviets deployed another six rifle divisions in August that were organized into Group *Pigarevich* (one rifle division and the 3rd Naval Infantry Brigade), and



the 31st, 131st and 99th Rifle corps. Meretskov planned a double envelopment to prevent the German retreat. The 99th and 131st Rifle corps, followed by the 31st Rifle Corps, would attack the German right flank. Group *Pigarevich* would keep 6. Gebirgs-Division occupied on the Litsa River. The 126th and 127th Light Rifle corps, commanded by Red Army officers Colonel V.N. Solovov and General-Major G.A. Zhukov, respectively, would carry out a deep envelopment by moving around Hill 237.1 and lodging themselves on the road junction west of Luostari. On the Soviet right, once the Red Army's attack had gathered momentum, the 12th Naval Infantry Brigade would attack across the Srednyi Isthmus and the 63rd Naval Infantry Brigade would land on the coastline. As well as interdicting the Germans at sea, the Northern Fleet was ordered to establish a naval base, and Golovko's staff planned an amphibious landing to seize Liinakhamari, a small port north of Petsamo on the west shore of Petsamo Fjord. On 29 September, Meretskov 'gave final instructions about the role of the fleet in the operation' (Golovko 1965: 207). On 8 October, Golovko moved his headquarters to Ozerko, where General-Major Dubovtsev's NDR headquarters was located. The naval aviation headquarters was also there, as was the motor torpedo boat headquarters.

The Red Army's attack commenced at 1035hrs on 7 October, preceded by an artillery barrage lasting two hours and 35 minutes. The 99th Rifle Corps had difficulty penetrating the German defences, but had crossed the Titovka River by the evening of 8 October. The more experienced 131st Rifle Corps was quicker, and on the morning of 8 October moved out of its bridgehead on the river to the Lanweg. Meanwhile, the 126th Light Rifle Corps crossed the Titovka River unopposed and would march 40km in 72 hours to occupy a road junction west of Luostari by 0800hrs on 10 October. The men carried loads of 40kg, comprising rations for eight days and extra ammunition. Horses carried the guns and mortars, and reindeer the ammunition for both. S.A. Pestanov, the chief-of-staff of the 70th Naval Rifle Brigade in the 127th Light Rifle Corps, marching a day behind, stated that each man carried boxes of rations, 1,500 rounds of ammunition and six hand grenades. Cold and wet, they moved over terrain that varied from frozen, moss-covered tundra to solid or fragmented rock to boggy mud. Their horses carrying ammunition were exhausted, but Zhukov decided to keep going to capture German supplies. In order to avoid being spotted, fires were forbidden.

Divisionsgruppe *van der Hoop* (Grenadier-Brigade 193 and Grenadier-Brigade 503) held positions along the coast all the way to the Titovka River, including Petsamo Bay and the Srednyi Peninsula. Grenadier-Brigade 503 was originally Feld-Regiment der Luftwaffe 503, formed on 1 December 1942 from disbanded construction battalions, which on 1 November 1943 transferred to the Heer (Army). Here, *Gebirgsjäger* officers with others from Grenadier-Brigade 503 observe training in the northern Arctic. (Simon Orchard)

Generaloberst Lothar Rendulic, commanding 20. Gebirgsarmee, was soon worried about a breakthrough in this sector. 6. Gebirgs-Division needed to withdraw before the light rifle corps could cut them off, and on the evening of 8 October, permission was given to move back to the Titovka River. Oberleutnant Kurt Siegel's Aufklärungs-Abteilung 112 was already further back, providing a rapid-reaction force on bicycles that could respond to enemy raids; the unit was attached to 210. Infanterie-Division, which provided static garrisons for coastal batteries along Norway's northern coast. At the start of the offensive, Major Max Mayer's I./GJR 143 was divisional reserve and in no immediate danger. II. and III./GJR 143 were more vulnerable as they were on the front line; on 9 October, when air reconnaissance detected their withdrawal, Meretskov ordered Golovko to begin his attack. To interdict the retreat further, Meretskov also wanted Luostari captured by the evening of 9 October. With tanks restricted to the Lanweg and artillery mostly out of range, however, the 99th Rifle Corps, attacking on the main road, was delayed by 2. Gebirgs-Division deployed on the river and, with more Soviet troops assigned to rebuilding damaged road sections, would not capture Luostari in time. One division going across country only reached the 127th Light Rifle Corps west of Luostari late on 11 October; and only by this time would the 131st Rifle Corps interdict the Russian Road further north.

With the envelopment by the light rifle corps delayed, attention turned to the coast. At 2330hrs on 9 October, 30 ships began landing 2,750 men of Colonel A.M. Krylov's 63rd Naval Infantry Brigade on the southern shore of Malaya Volokovaya Inlet with the intention of moving on the rear of German defences on the Musta Tunturi Range on the southern side of the Srednyi Isthmus. The first wave hugged the coast and, despite a barrage of star shells, launched smoke through which their fast boats motored to land troops unopposed on the enemy-held shore. A diversion at Motovskiy Bay – including a naval bombardment by the destroyers *Gremyashchiy* and *Gromki*, small ships laying smokescreens and a platoon of troops ashore – failed to deceive the Germans.

This was of little consequence, as insufficient forces existed to respond rapidly to the landing. The disorientation created by German searchlights and the Soviet smokescreen did more to fragment the landings; only seven of 12 companies (including the 3rd Battalion, commanded by Major J.H. Krasil'nikova) were under command. Captain A. Panev with the 1st Battalion led his men south and then without support decided to return to the beach; 2nd Company, under Senior Lieutenant N.Z. Shepetukha, maintained radio contact with brigade, however, who ordered them to move onto Hill 299 to interdict the Titovka–Porovaara road. Captain S.F. Belousev remained on the beach with part of the 2nd Battalion to search for missing units.

The ground attack conducted at 0330hrs by the 12th Naval Infantry Brigade under Colonel V.V. Rassokhin (deputy commander for political affairs, Colonel N.I. Smirnov) on the Musta ridgeline was more effective. Preceded by a 90-minute artillery bombardment by 209 guns, two battalions penetrated German defences manned by Grenadier-Brigade 193, with Major A. Petrov's 1st Battalion seizing Hill 146 by 0930hrs and breaking through to the 63rd Naval Infantry Brigade elements at Lake Tiajärvi by 1200hrs. A snowstorm had covered the signs sappers had placed to show gaps in the



Before the Soviet landing at Liinakhamari, torpedoes breached the boom defence at the fjord entrance. Then, two torpedo boats, commanded by Captain-Lieutenant (later Rear Admiral) A.O. Shabalin and Lieutenant E.A. Uspensky, approached; they had 52 sailors on board, who were armed with SMGs and organized in two platoons commanded by Senior Lieutenant B.F. Petersburgsky and Lieutenant Alexandrov. Two night bombers attacking the coastal batteries helped cover the noise the boats were making. Here is one of the boats in Petsamo Fjord. (Photo by: Sovfoto/UIG via Getty Images)

minefield, but also disguised the brigade's approach. Soviet losses were still heavy, with 76 killed and 289 wounded.

At dawn on 11 October, both naval infantry brigades resumed their offensive; by the end of the day the 63rd Naval Infantry Brigade had cut the Titovka–Petsamo road. On Hill 268, Shepetukha lost a third of his men to counter-attacks, but still managed to destroy a road bridge at the foot of the hill. Belousev was called forward from the beach. Krasil'nikova fought alongside Petrov against Major Gebhard's III./GrenBrig 503. The 624th Separate Tank Company, 347th Machine Gun Battalion and a company of the 348th Machine Gun Battalion were in support. By the early hours of 12 October, Shepetukha reported that the enemy had withdrawn. The military historian Gebhardt suggests the Soviet pursuit was compromised because the naval infantry lacked training in night operations, while the Russian historian Mikhail Suprun postulates that navigation at night in the tundra was too difficult.

On the other flank, by midday on 12 October, the 99th Rifle Corps had at last captured Luostari, but was fending off counter-attacks from 163. Infanterie-Division, which had moved north from Rovaniemi on 10 October. The 72nd Naval Rifle Brigade was blocking the Tarnet Road and further east the 70th Naval Rifle Brigade was defending heights south of the road; both were without artillery or mortars, which had made only slow progress across the rocky terrain. Attention turned to the landing at Liinakhamari, planned for the night of 12/13 October. First on the agenda was the neutralization of the battery at Cape Krestovyi, which 'might greatly assist the passage of our warships into the interior of Petsamovuono [Petsamo] Fjord and accelerate the capture of Pechenga [Petsamo]' (Golovko 1965: 212–13).

Liinakhamari, 12–13 October 1944

MAP KEY

- 1 Dawn, 12 October:** Senior Lieutenant Leonov's party attacks and captures the anti-aircraft guns of 3./gemFlaKAbt 302 on Cape Krestovyi. Captain Barchenko-Emel'ianov's force attacks the positions of 1./HKAA 773, but fails to capture the battery.
- 2 Morning, 12 October:** Elements of the *Stabs-Kompanie* of Grenadier-Brigade 503 and Aufklärungs-Abteilung 112 land on Cape Krestovyi and Leonov retreats from the anti-aircraft battery.
- 3 Midday, 12 October:** The Germans push on to the strongpoint, but the Soviet defences, supported by fighter-bombers, hold.
- 4 Early evening, 12 October:** Supported by one platoon and two squads from the NDR scouts, Leonov retakes the anti-aircraft battery and shore.
- 5 2302hrs, 12 October:** Major Timofeev's composite battalion begins to land at Liinakhamari. The first two boats with Senior Lieutenant Petersburgsky's men on board break into the bay under German fire and are soon landing assault troops on piers No. 5 and No. 27.
- 6 2310hrs, 12 October:** Having hugged the western shore, three of the second group of five Soviet torpedo boats, spotted 3–5km from the inlet, succeed in landing their troops in the bay. One boat lands men on Cape Krestovyi.
- 7 c.2330hrs, 12 October:** The third Soviet group, comprising machine-gun troops commanded by Timofeev, enters the bay in four smaller boats and a torpedo boat.
- 8 0200hrs, 13 October:** The 4th Machine Gun Company captures the positions of 2./HKAA 773 on the northern shore of the bay.
- 9 Night, 12/13 October:** A company from the 63rd Naval Infantry Brigade reinforces Barchenko-Emel'ianov on Cape Krestovyi.
- 10 Dawn, 13 October:** The Germans at Cape Krestovyi battery surrender.
- 11 c.1100hrs, 13 October:** Major Mayer's I./GJR 143 approaches from Petsamo and joins up with what remains of the garrison and elements of Aufklärungs-Abteilung 112. Mayer's men reach the quays, but are quickly repelled.
- 12 1200hrs, 13 October:** The Germans temporarily recapture the positions of 2./HKAA 773.
- 13 Mid-afternoon, 13 October:** I./GJR 143 and elements of Aufklärungs-Abteilung 112 withdraw. They encounter Petersburgsky's men near Lake Purojärvi and are attacked by Soviet aircraft.

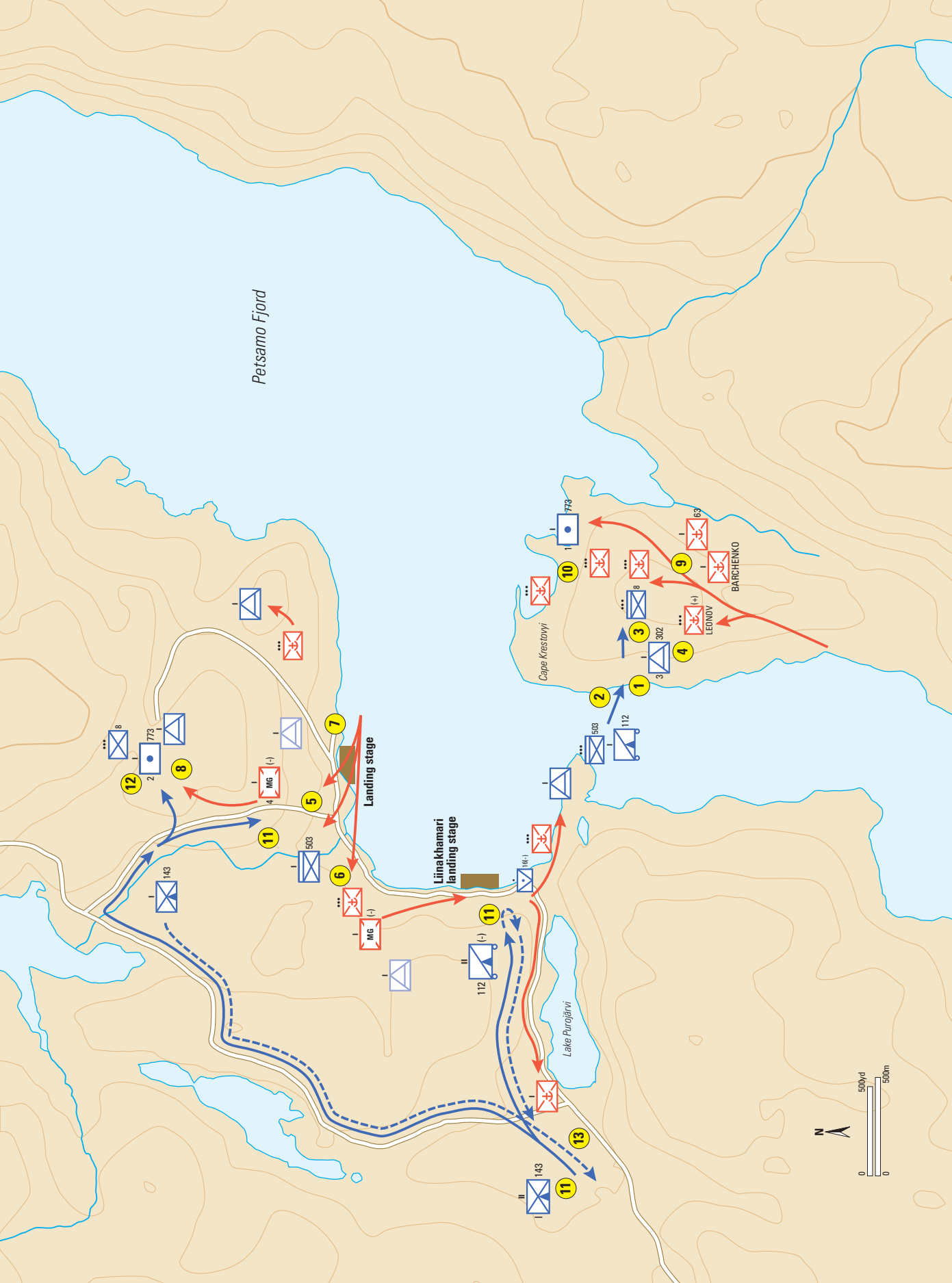
Battlefield environment

In October the climate is cold and moist, with temperatures of between +5°C and -5°C. There is frequent precipitation, falling either as snow or rain and snow. Heavy fog can descend from the Barents Sea. The number of daylight hours reduces from 13.5 to ten at the end of the month. Inland hills are covered with

rock and ascend to 580m. There are many gullies and ravines and low scrub trees and bushes. All trees are leafless. On 10 October 1944, the temperature was around freezing, with a strong wind blowing from the sea. Marching any distance in this terrain was arduous.

Here is Liinakhamari harbour before the war. The landing zone is visible at the top of the picture. The leading boat in each group had a pilot familiar with the bay, and hydrographic surveys were carried out beforehand. (Author's Collection)





Leonov described how on 10 October 1944, once his boat reached the shore, 'long gangplanks were thrown out and the cutter crewmen jumped down and picked up the end' and 'Standing up to their waists in the freezing water, they provided us a dry path to the shore' (Leonov 1993: 108). This made the assault troops highly vulnerable, but not getting wet was the aim, as the shoreline was covered in snow and the temperature was below zero. Some boats also stayed by the shore to enable follow-on boats to moor alongside. (Photo by TASS via Getty Images)

INTO COMBAT

On Cape Romanov, on the east side of Petsamo Fjord, 1./MAA 517 manned four 15cm SK C/28 artillery pieces in twin mounts. With four 15cm L/40 guns and two 15cm SK C/28 pieces in a twin turret, 2./MAA 517 was located at the headland on the west side. Opposite Liinakhamari Bay, 1./HKAA 773 was on the eastern side of the fjord on Cape Krestovyi (Ristenieni) with four 15.5cm K418(f) guns, and 2./HKAA 773 was on the northern side of Liinakhamari Bay with two 21cm K39/40 guns. An anti-aircraft battery, 3./gemFlaKAht 302, was also on Cape Krestovyi.

In the early hours of 10 October, Barchenko-Emel'ianov with his raiding detachment landed safely, and began his march south-west in a snowstorm which turned to rain in the morning. The valleys were filled with snow and those men in front had to have ropes attached while checking for crevasses. During the day, cover was sought amongst the rocks, and to blend in, they removed their white camouflage smocks. By the following morning they had covered 15km and were resting, hidden in bushes at the southern end of Lake Sisajärvi. Then Golovko radioed them to get a move on, as the attack on the Musta hills was succeeding. By nightfall, Cape Krestovyi was in sight and the men in six hours 'scaled down the last and steepest rocky face' (Leonov 1993: 111). Leonov prepared to assault the four 8.8cm anti-aircraft guns (3./gemFlaKAht 302) on a gentle slope on the southern part of the cape; Kubarev and Pivovarov, a





FAR LEFT

On the northern Arctic coast, elevations of over 300m are found 2–3km inland and the tundra is dominated by rock covered with lichen and moss, sparsely vegetated and interspersed with streams and lakes. The hills around Liinakhamari are particularly forbidding. A stream runs to the bay from the south-west and was described in a tourist guide as a steep, birch-grown glen that forms innumerable small rapids and falls. Paths went through high, steep mountain walls with water cascading down following rain. There are steep gorges, dark lakes and poor vegetation. In places the slopes descend abruptly into the bay. (Author's Collection)

strongpoint 300m further north, which guarded the landward approaches to the coastal guns on the northern shore; and Sintsov, 1./HKAA 773. A rocket would signal the start of the two initial attacks. The Germans had two *Gruppen* from 7. and 8./GrenBrig 503 on Cape Krestovyi, as well as 100 personnel manning the 15.5cm battery and 100 personnel manning the 8.8cm battery.

At the anti-aircraft battery, in the pre-dawn hours of 12 October Leonov's men were amid wire some 40–50m from the 8.8cm guns when a rocket went up. The barbed wire was crossed and Petty Officer 1st Class S.M. Agafonov and Senior Seaman A.P. Pshenichnykh clambered on top of a dugout near a gun and ambushed the crew as they exited. Then they turned the gun on the enemy and opened fire. Germans were seen leaving a barracks and Leonov told Chief Petty Officer A. Barinov to stop them reaching the guns. Elsewhere, machine guns were firing from two bunkers and PPSH-41 SMGs were fired at the embrasures to cover others who approached the bunkers to throw in grenades. The barracks was similarly dealt with, but Barinov was killed. Meanwhile, Barchenko-Emel'ianov's men soon captured the strongpoint. German survivors withdrew in haste to the alerted 15.5cm battery, where the assault on these well-dug-in Germans in bunkers and trenches behind barbed wire was repulsed. A Soviet section sent around the west flank to attack along the shore was driven back by the incoming tide. One source suggests that the besieged Germans began to destroy their guns, but Leonov states that they fired in support of a German counter-attack. Barchenko-Emel'ianov reported to headquarters that he was unable to capture or destroy the guns.

At the anti-aircraft battery, Leonov was targeted by German batteries from around the bay and 'ordered the men to remove the breech blocks from the cannons and crawl towards the nearest ridge, from which we could over watch the destroyed battery' (Leonov 1993: 113). At dawn, two enemy cutters and three launches were seen carrying men from Grenadier-Brigade 503's headquarters company and Aufklärungs-Abteilung 112.

LEFT

At the anti-aircraft battery on Cape Krestovyi, Leonov reported how 'One small bell jingled, and from various places others responded. The sound travelled around, and a series of coloured flares arched up into the sky ... On the other side of the wire a barrack ... could be seen ... we also spotted two guns with elevated barrels, which now were slowly being lowered in our direction, and a guard running from the barbed wire to the barrack. All of this was twenty to forty metres from us' (Leonov 1993: 111). Chief Petty Officer A. Barinov threw his quilted jacket onto the wire and crossed over. Commissar Guzenkov jumped over and radio operator Ivan Lysenko hauled up the stanchion that kept the wire in place so others could crawl under. (Courtesy of the Central Museum of the Armed Forces, Moscow via Stavka)

OPPOSITE

Here, naval infantry wait expectantly as they approach Liinakhamari. Each boat was assigned a quay on which to land its men. If unable to do so, it was instructed to disembark at the closest beach. In the event, smoke was so thick that only three of the seven boats in the first and second waves reached their designated landing piers undamaged. Two second-wave boats landed men on the eastern side of the bay by accident, some at Cape Krestovyi. Two other boats were hit, though they managed to leave the battlefield following landing. The assault troops soon began a stubborn battle for the shore. Private G. Ivanov jumped into the water at a pier seemingly rigged with explosives and quickly cut the wires. (Photo by: Sovfoto/UiG via Getty Images)

Leonov sent men to the shore to repel the landing. More ships approached and landed German soldiers on a broad front. One group surprised Leonov and he ran to engage them in close combat. Rifle butts were used as the Germans were up against a cliff they had climbed. Feldwebel Herbert Koopman, from Grenadier-Brigade 503's headquarters company, was recorded wounded and the attack was later accepted as worthy of an Infantry Assault Badge in Silver and close-combat award. The commander of 1./AufklAbt 112 was also recorded wounded that day. According to Golovko, when the Germans approached the strongpoint, Soviet aircraft carried out ten air strikes and others then dropped several parachute containers of ammunition and supplies. Soviet coastal artillery from the Srednyi Peninsula also assisted. By dusk, Leonov was back at the anti-aircraft position. The following morning the Soviet party fired at Liinakhamari, setting fire to a petrol tank and a wooden warehouse.

The 20. Armee daily report for 12 October (issued on 13 October), compiled by its chief-of-staff, Generalmajor Hermann Holter, incorrectly stated that Soviet patrol boats had penetrated Petsamo Fjord and a landing had occurred near Liinakhamari. The report correctly described how 60–80 commandos surprised the crew of the anti-aircraft base in the Ristenieniemi (Krestovyi) area to take possession of the battery. The captured battery was reportedly defeated by coastal batteries on the west bank of Petsamo Bay and then occupied by soldiers from Aufklärungs-Abteilung 112. Holter warned that a Soviet landing on the west coast of Petsamo Fjord should not be ruled out, and Rendulic stated in his orders that such an eventuality must be prevented. To achieve this, sufficient forces were to be moved up. Rendulic also stated that the positions on Petsamo Fjord's east bank were to be given up only when ordered. 1./HKAA 773 continued to resist.

At 2000hrs, Barchenko-Emel'ianov was informed by radio that Liinakhamari would be assaulted in three hours' time. After the battle, he told Kabanov that he had not been given a radio cipher and was only told about the landing that night. A total of 660 men, composed 'of volunteers from ships and fleet units and from machine-gun battalions on Rybachi' (Golovko 1965: 214), participated in the assault under Major I.A. Timofeev, the commander of the 349th Separate Machine Gun Battalion. The commander of the naval infantry was Senior Lieutenant B.F. Petersburgsky. A coastal battery, the port, a military post and the commanding hills in the vicinity of the port were to be seized and held until reinforcements arrived. The assault landing was supported by a squadron of torpedo boats which could fire directly at enemy bunkers on the shore, but there is no evidence that this occurred at Liinakhamari.

Heavy resistance was expected. Soviet intelligence had identified: a battery of four 2cm anti-aircraft guns on the promontory on the southern side of the bay; a 7.5cm gun (probably manned by 20 personnel of 1./GebPzJgAbt 47, as the unit's 35-year-old Austrian commander, Hauptmann Heinrich Gebhauer, is recorded as being shot and killed there on 13 October) in a pillbox covering the road exit from the beach on the south-west side; two three-gun 2cm anti-aircraft batteries under the harbour commandant, situated on the western and northern side of the bay that



covered the quays (not shown on German maps but referenced in Soviet descriptions of the attack); and 2./HKAA 773, manning a four-gun 8.8cm anti-aircraft battery, with four 2cm anti-aircraft guns manned by a heavy-weapons platoon from 8./GrenBrig 503 in support. Other German forces at Liinakhamari comprised Grenadier-Brigade 503's headquarters company (including a *Radfahr-Zug* and a *Pionier-Zug*), 50 naval personnel and around 50 RAD troops.

At 2302hrs the two boats of the first wave broke into the bay under German fire and landed assault troops on piers No. 5 and No. 27. The second group of five torpedo boats, under the command of Captain S.G. Koroschunovich, was spotted 3–5km from the inlet. The Germans tried to illuminate them for the coastal batteries by using searchlights and star shells, but the torpedo boats changed their speed and direction, made smoke and hugged the western shore, and three landed their troops at 2310hrs; the third group – led by Guards Captain S.D. Zyuvín and comprising four smaller boats and a torpedo boat – carried the machine-gun troops with Timofeev. Throughout the operation, Cape Krestovyi remained silent, either because the guns there were destroyed or because the crews were preoccupied by Barchenko-Emel'ianov's men.

Viktor Leonov

Born in 1916, Viktor Leonov was working at a repair facility at Poliarnyi Naval Base when the Germans invaded. He soon volunteered with the Northern Fleet's reconnaissance detachment and participated in a succession of raids, including in support of the 12th Naval Infantry Brigade in April 1942. During an unsuccessful attack on Cape Mogil'nyi later that year he was surrounded, but escaped with his section during the night, carrying the wounded Lieutenant Shlavin. Ammunition was running low and his men relied on grenades to suppress enemy resistance. With only two men standing and six wounded, Leonov was eventually picked up further down the coast by Commissar Dubrovskiy, who had returned in a patrol boat looking for survivors. Admiral Arseniy Golovko, who closely

monitored the unit's operations, made Leonov an officer as he had answered for the fate of his soldiers.

Leonov was appointed commissar in December 1942 and detachment commander in the spring of 1943. During the raid on the 8.8cm battery at Cape Krestovyi he led from the front in repelling the German counter-attack. More than 100 naval infantrymen were awarded the Hero of the Soviet Union, and Leonov was awarded the title twice. He survived the war and in 1950 attended the Kirov Caspian Naval School; in 1956 he was briefly an instructor at the Voroshilov Naval Academy before officially retiring later that year. He died in 2003, and a Vishnya-class intelligence-gathering ship (*Viktor Leonov*) is named in his honour.

In the first wave, Petersburgsky's men were fired at by the 7.5cm gun in a bunker, but his troops advanced and captured the position. Lieutenant Alexandrov's men landed into a coal dock. Alexandrov was wounded and Senior Sergeant I.P. Katorzhnyy assumed command. German positions were eliminated in a short battle; the second wave could then land and spread out along the beach. The fuel bunkers and pier were soon captured. A two-storey building – the hotel – housing an anti-aircraft gun and situated at the end of the harbour was causing more difficulty, and had to be stormed by Petersburgsky's men. Together with Private Korolev, Katorzhnyy broke into the building and raised a red flag on the roof. He was made a Hero of the Soviet Union. Another platoon took the four 2cm anti-aircraft guns on the south side of the bay and another, under Lieutenant M. Matyuhin, an 8.8cm gun on heights on the north side. The third wave's objective was 2./HKAA 773, deployed in three firing bunkers linked with communication trenches, and 57 soldiers from the 4th Machine Gun Company scaled the cliffs and took the position.

In the 13 October morning report, Holter mentioned how the enemy achieved surprise by using smoke during their landing and had taken the harbour and town. The report stated that the enemy was moving north to attack the coastal-artillery units. The counter-attack by 6. Gebirgs-Division was mentioned, but there were no reports. On the morning of 13 October, the commander of I./GJR 143, Major Max Mayer – who was probably forewarned of an imminent move the previous day because Holter expected a landing – may have used some battalion vehicles to head up the road from Petsamo, which was 15.7km away. He was told that the heavy weapons of 8./GrenBrig 503 would support him, but also took his *Maschinengewehr-Kompanie* as Oberjäger Heinz Leonhardt – who was a heavy-machine-gun team leader from that unit – had been recommended for an Infantry Assault Badge in Silver, partly because of his role in attacking Liinakhamari on 13 October. It is unclear whether Mayer took all his companies. Obergefreiter

Max Mayer

Born in Munich, Max Mayer originally joined Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 139 in 1938. He transferred to Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 143 and served in the northern Arctic from late 1941. On numerous occasions he showed his willingness to act quickly and decisively. In November 1941, while defending a strongpoint from a determined attack, he was commended as the soul of resistance, and in December lauded as an example to his men as he led them in two night battles. In April 1942, he led a small group in a counter-attack against a raiding Soviet force.

On 26 March 1944, Mayer personally led 3./GJR 143 on skis to raid enemy positions and captured two guns with 1,000 rounds of ammunition and three HMGs. The attack was mentioned in OKW's daily communiqué. On

26 April 1944, a German position on the south side of Motovskiy Bay was attacked by two Soviet companies and Mayer found some of the garrison still resisting the assault. He assumed command and stormed an enemy position with several grenades; with his MP 40 SMG, he shot down one enemy soldier and took three more prisoner. On 13 October 1944, he commanded I./GJR 143 at Liinakhamari, and General der Gebirgstruppe Ferdinand Jodl reported how he temporarily recaptured the quay. In the light of Mayer's previous record, rather than adopting the traditional battalion-commander role played by Raithel, it is likely that he took a more active role in the direction of the German counter-attack at Liinakhamari. Mayer was made acting commander of Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 141 in April 1945.

Karl Lackner from 1./GJR 143 was recommended for the Infantry Assault Badge in Silver for the attack on Liinakhamari, as was Leutnant Gustav Margreiter from 2./GJR 143. Leutnant Gottfried Pichler commanded 1./GJR 143; Oberleutnant der Reserve Johann Krautzer led 2./GJR 143; Hauptmann Peiper commanded 3./GJR 143; 4./GJR 143 was probably led by Leutnant Franz Eicher; and Leutnant Johann Granögger commanded 5./GJR 143.

According to Suprun, Soviet reconnaissance aircraft detected Mayer's column approaching from Trifon. In a nine-page report written that November, Jodl reported how Mayer temporarily recaptured the quay. He also managed to counter-attack the positions of 2./HKAA 773 and a battle for the strongpoint developed. There was an approach to the battery that did not go through the port area and some of Mayer's men probably used this route rather than trying to move through an area already teeming with Soviet troops. This road, called the *Peterweg*, was built to help facilitate the building of the battery and could not be easily observed from the port area.

The Germans reportedly recaptured the battery by 1200hrs, but later in the day, Mayer was told to break off the attack and move south to Petsamo to deal with Soviet tank attacks that had captured Speer Bridge. There, the two other battalions of Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 143 and three battalions of Grenadier-Brigade 388 were cut off on the east bank. By Speer Bridge, II./GJR 143 had a difficult time crossing and suffered 100 dead and wounded; III./GJR 143 was similarly interdicted while crossing Prinz Eugen Bridge and the battalion commander, Major Hans Ruef, was wounded and played dead, but at night crept towards the river and swam across. During Mayer's withdrawal he encountered Petersburgsky, who with his naval infantry company was near Lake Purojärvi and in a position to interdict the road; the Soviet troops were isolated and vulnerable, however, and Mayer deployed his men to climb elevations to find positions for his

machine guns. The Soviets called in air support and Timofeev reported to headquarters that 'all the granite hillocks are shrouded in fire and smoke' (quoted in Golovko 1965: 216).

Holter reported that I./GJR 143 broke out that night. Elements of Aufklärungs-Abteilung 112 also did so; losses to the unit were heavy on 13 October, with the 2./AufklAbt 112 commander, Oberleutnant Felgenhauer, and platoon leader Leutnant Oscar Wolke each suffering a minor wound, while a second platoon leader was wounded more seriously, probably in the vicinity of Liinakhamari. Rittermeister Erich Schwarz, commanding 3./AufklAbt 112, was killed on 13 October at Liinakhamari, and Hauptwachtmeister Franz Kaiblinger, the squadron's senior NCO, and platoon leader Leutnant Karl Dallermassl were both wounded there. It appears that 4./AufklAbt 112 was not present at Liinakhamari, as the squadron commander, Oberleutnant Emil Auer, was recorded killed on 13 October on the road called the Schwabenweg. Oberleutnant Siegel, the battalion commander, was killed on another road, called the Eismeerstrasse, on 14 October.

On Cape Krestovyi, Barchenko-Emel'ianov, reinforced by a company from the 63rd Naval Infantry Brigade, had sent a German officer to the shore battery with an ultimatum on 13 October. Following a delay, the garrison of 78 officers and men surrendered. That evening, Barchenko-Emel'ianov's detachment went across to Liinakhamari. In three days the raiding force had lost 53 men killed and wounded, or 27 per cent of their 195-man force. Leonov met with Golovko and successfully recommended Agafonov and Pshenichnykh as Heroes of the Soviet Union. Golovko told Leonov that he and Barchenko-Emel'ianov were also recommended. The naval infantry brigades crossed the bay on 14 October and began an attack towards Petsamo. Petrov's 1st Battalion took Trifon. By 0500hrs on 15 October, with Red Army units closing in from the south-east, the 131st Rifle Corps captured Petsamo. Losses to the NDR were 323 killed and 822 wounded.

While the Soviet operation was a success, the intended envelopment of 6. Gebirgs-Division east of the Titovka had failed. Amphibious operations were not ambitious enough or carried out early enough for the naval infantry to interdict the Germans' escape route. The intentions of the naval rifle brigades were similarly frustrated as late on 13 October their positions around the Tarnet Road were pushed back, allowing 18,000 German troops to retreat along this route. The cost was high, however, with 6. Gebirgs-Division losses for October recorded as 18 officers and 451 enlisted killed, 34 officers and 1,232 enlisted wounded, and five officers and 542 enlisted missing. During 1–20 October, Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 143 lost seven officers and 142 enlisted killed, seven officers and 353 enlisted wounded, and one officer and 241 enlisted missing. At the same time, Aufklärungs-Abteilung 112 lost three officers and 47 enlisted killed, six officers and 111 enlisted wounded, and two officers and 90 enlisted missing. Grenadier-Brigade 388 lost four officers and 104 enlisted killed, ten officers and 262 enlisted wounded, and six officers and 366 missing. Casualties to Grenadier-Brigade 503 were so heavy that I. and II./GrenBrig 503 were disbanded and their remaining troops sent to III./GrenBrig 503, which also received reinforcements from 6. Gebirgs-Division, such as Rudi Hebenstreit from Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 141.

Nikel (Kolossjoki)

18–22 October 1944

BACKGROUND TO BATTLE

Following the fall of Petsamo, the Soviet command ordered a three-day pause in operations. Supplies for the light rifle corps were brought into Luostari airfield. The next stage of the operation was planned as follows: in the north, a pursuit into Norway along the Tarnet Road prior to an advance on Kirkenes; in the centre, an advance to the Pasvik River in Norway; and in the south, an advance down the Nikel Road to capture the Nikel mines. The 131st, 99th and 31st Rifle corps were assigned these objectives, respectively. The 126th Light Rifle Corps was ordered to support the 99th Rifle Corps on its northern flank, and the 127th Light Rifle Corps was ordered on a wide flanking move to interdict the Nikel Road south of Nikel in support of the 31st Rifle Corps. While 6. Gebirgs-Division defended the Tarnet Road, 163. Infanterie-Division's Grenadier-Regiment 307 was positioned along the Arctic Ocean Highway, and a battalion of 163. Infanterie-Division's Grenadier-Regiment 324 supported elements of 2. Gebirgs-Division's

Soviet tank forces supported the offensive, but did not accompany the naval riflemen as the absence of roads and suitable cross-country terrain limited their utility. The 7th Guards Tank Brigade (37 T-34s), 89th Separate Tank Regiment (18 T-34s), 339th Guards Heavy Self-Propelled Artillery Regiment (17 ISU-152s), 378th Guards Heavy Self-Propelled Artillery Regiment (17 ISU-152s) and 73rd Separate Guards Heavy Tank Regiment (21 KV-85s) all arrived in early October. German bunkers were built around the nickel mines and included 8.8cm anti-aircraft guns. Here, a wooden-log bunker with a rarer 7.5cm anti-tank gun is shown following capture in the northern Arctic. (Courtesy of the Central Museum of the Armed Forces, Moscow via Stavka)





The 126th and 127th Light Rifle corps were established in March 1944; each had an artillery battalion of 12 76mm mountain guns and a mortar battalion of 12 120mm mortars. Each was equivalent to an infantry division. Each naval rifle brigade also had a mortar battalion and an artillery battalion, but naval rifle battalions did not have any 82mm mortars. Here, the crew of a 120mm mortar prepare to fire. (Courtesy of the Central Museum of the Armed Forces, Moscow via Stavka)

Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 137 on the Nikel Road. A battalion from Grenadier-Brigade 193 that retreated with 2. Gebirgs-Division from Luostari was also defending positions along the Nikel Road.

Owing to the losses it had suffered in the South Karelia offensive during the summer, the 127th Light Rifle Corps was initially in the second echelon when the Petsamo offensive started. The 70th Naval Rifle Brigade had already undertaken a long march to the Tarnet Road, but was pushed off that position on 13 October. Roschmann reported how the brigade's 3rd Battalion had three infantry companies and a machine-gun company; it was accompanied by a mortar battery (four 120mm weapons) as well as an SMG platoon and a scout platoon. No anti-tank guns were present because of the difficult terrain and because the Soviets knew they would not be needed. Roschmann also mentioned an SMG company. In May 1943 all naval rifle units had replaced a third of their rifles with SMGs. Some units formed a separate SMG squad in each rifle platoon, others an SMG platoon in each rifle company, and others – such as those in the 70th Naval Rifle Brigade – an SMG company in each battalion. By the end of 1943, some had even replaced their third battalion with an SMG battalion.

I./GJR 137 was positioned in reserve between Salmijärvi airfield and Kolosjoki. II./GJR 137 (Hauptmann Graf Strachwitz) was assigned a long front south of Salmijärvi airfield. III./GJR 137 (Major Köhnen) defended the Kolosjoki mines. The regiment's *Panzerjäger-Kompanie* and bicycle platoon carried out mobile patrols along the Arctic Ocean Highway. 2./AufklAbt 67



When artillery was in range, Soviet spotter aircraft 'maintained good communications with their artillery' and 'directed fire with surprising efficiency', but fighter-bombers 'obtained only minor results and were not feared by the German troops' (Brockelmann & Roschmann 1952: 127). There were not many German fighters (only one squadron) to oppose them. Here, in the northern Arctic, a German anti-aircraft crew check for enemy aircraft before having a meal from a field kitchen. (Nik Cornish at www.stavka.org.uk)

was stationed as a tactical reserve to III./GJR 137. Weapons and equipment lost during the retreat from Luostari were replaced with stocks at Salmijärvi airfield. Though supplies were plentiful, there were deficiencies of weapon types – each platoon had only two or three SMGs, and there were no automatic rifles or 12cm mortars. Platoons had one or two rifle grenade launchers that were useful in forest fighting. 1./GAR 111, with seven 7.5cm guns, was assigned to the regiment and was positioned south-west of Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 137's headquarters. Two 15cm and three 10.5cm batteries were near Salmijärvi and an artillery liaison team was with the regimental headquarters. There were nine heavy and six light anti-aircraft guns in the Hochkofel, Spitzkofel and Brechkofel strongpoints around Kolosjoki.

Soviet naval rifle companies did not have any integral HMGs or mortars, but this did not stop the commander giving each rifle company a machine-gun platoon from the battalion's machine-gun company. Here, Soviet troops with a Maxim HMG infiltrate a forest in the Arctic. (Courtesy of the Central Museum of the Armed Forces, Moscow via Stavka)



Nikel (Kolosjoki), 18–22 October 1944

MAP KEY

- 1 Evening, 18 October:** The 127th Light Rifle Corps begins its transit of the tundra.
- 2 19 October:** The 70th Naval Rifle Brigade is detected by German aerial reconnaissance and is targeted by dive-bombers.
- 3 19 October:** One regiment from the 367th Rifle Division is halted before Hill 441.4 by elements of Grenadier-Regiment 324 and Grenadier-Brigade 193, but another Soviet regiment advances cross-country south of the road.
- 4 20 October:** The 367th Rifle Division, supported by the 89th Tank Regiment and artillery, is yet to neutralize German defensive positions on Hill 441.4. Other units from the Soviet division advance on Nickel from the flanks and are able to reach closer to the town.
- 5 1720hrs, 20 October:** The bicycle platoon from Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 137 reports that a Soviet battalion is blocking the road 700m from the south-east corner of Lake Kuotsijärvi.
- 6 0800hrs, 21 October:** 2. and 3./GJR 137 form up either side of the road near Lake Kuotsijärvi. Supported by a heavy artillery bombardment, the two German companies begin the attack against the 3rd Battalion, 70th Naval Rifle Brigade, defending a disused quarry near the road.
- 7 0930hrs, 21 October:** With the support of an 8.8cm gun, the Germans push the Soviets back to the quarry.
- 8 0945hrs, 21 October:** 1./GJR 137 supports the German attack on the right flank.
- 9 0945hrs, 21 October:** Elements of Aufklärungs-Abteilung 67 and a reinforced company from III./GJR 137 attack from the east.
- 10 0945hrs, 21 October:** Soviet 120mm mortars attempt to respond to the German attack.
- 11 1030hrs, 21 October:** The 3rd Battalion, 70th Naval Rifle Brigade is destroyed. In total, 600 Soviet naval riflemen are killed and 200 are taken prisoner; 150, separated from the main body and on patrols, escape. All German troops around Nickel (1,000 men) are able to withdraw.
- 12 21 October:** A regiment from the 83rd Rifle Division reinforces the 367th Rifle Division and pushes past Hill 441.4, but is stopped at Hill 482 and only defeats this position at 1900hrs.
- 13 Morning, 22 October:** 127th Light Rifle Corps units move into Nickel from the south.

Battlefield environment

The terrain between Luostari and Nickel is dominated by rocky hills interspersed with ravines and swampy depressions. Several hills are over 300m with the highest, Hill 631 (on which the German position *Murmanblick* was located), nearly double this. They only have shrubs and moss on their tops. The single road was the only way vehicles could traverse this terrain.

The area around Nickel combined tundra and taiga and was 'covered with a heavy growth of pines and birches, and dense underbrush of shrubs, reeds, and high moss. This hampered observation by the German heavy weapons as well as the movement of larger units away from the roads' (Brockelmann & Roschmann 1952: 130). Here, a German patrol traverses one of the trails used by infantry and pack mules. (Nik Cornish at www.stavka.org.uk)



Watercourses were not completely frozen and could not support movement across them. Snow melted away during the day. The sun rose at 0830hrs and dusk began at 1530hrs. There was no snow on the morning of 20 October, but a cold wind howled over the rocky hills and the ground was frozen.

INTO COMBAT

On the evening of 16 October, the 31st Rifle Corps began a long approach march and on the morning of 18 October, the 367th Rifle Division made good progress before being brought to a halt in front of Hill 466. With less resistance encountered than expected, General-Lieutenant V.I. Shcherbakov, the commander of the 14th Army, ordered General-Major M. Absaliyev, the 31st Rifle Corps commander, to capture Nikel in one day rather than three; on 19 October, however, staunch defensive fire emanating from a succession of hills stalled the Soviet advance. On 20 October, Hill 441.4 was the main menace. The Germans had mined the road and Absaliyev reported that an engineer platoon supporting the attached tank brigade had to remove 452 mines and bombs in a 10km stretch. Soviet artillery suffered from an ammunition shortage because of the inability to move up shells. Tanks were committed on a one-tank frontage. Again, the frontal attacks had stalled, but the light rifle corps made better progress.

On the evening of 18 October, the 127th Light Rifle Corps began its transit of the tundra. The plan was for the 69th Naval Rifle Brigade to attack Nikel from the south and the 70th Naval Rifle Brigade to cut the main road south-west of Nikel by 1700hrs on 20 October. On the night of 18/19 October, the Soviet forces covered 15km; at 0900hrs on 19 October, German dive-bombers found them and attacked. Minimal casualties were suffered by the Soviets, but their presence was detected. Through frequent rain and strong winds the advance proceeded, and some of Zhukov's men were astride the Nikel Road by the early evening of 20 October. During the early hours of 21 October, however, this battalion from the 70th Naval Rifle Brigade would lack support from the 31st Rifle Corps. The 367th Rifle Division only got past Hill 441.4 at 1200hrs on 20 October, and was still 2–3km short of Nikel the following day.

At 1500hrs on 19 October, III./GJR 137 reported by phone an enemy force in company strength infiltrating between Murmanbick and Spitzkofel. The Soviets conducted a forced march that night and on 20 October crept along a waterway. They were told to block the road near Lake Kuotsijärvi and knew there was a disused quarry near the road. Three German aircraft were being used for reconnaissance patrolling along the Arctic Ocean Highway, but bad weather prevented their use on 19 October. Here, *Gebirgsjäger* officers look out for approaching Soviet troops seeking to infiltrate around their positions. (Nik Cornish at www.stavka.org.uk)





On the evening of 20 October, the radio officer at Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 137 headquarters reported that 'owing to magnetic disturbances in the vicinity of the mines and the lack of anode batteries communication with 3rd Battalion had gone from bad to worse' (Brockelmann & Roschmann 1952: 136). Because 'the existing radio communications are uncertain', Major Grumm was unable to coordinate with III./GJR 137; however, he thought Generalleutnant Hans Degen, the commanding officer of 2. Gebirgs-Division, 'will do everything in his power to support the relief from outside by a counterattack from Kolosjoki with all available forces' (quoted in Brockelmann & Roschmann 1952: 133). Here, a man-pack radio operator is pictured in the northern Arctic. (Nik Cornish at www.stavka.org.uk)

The Germans realized that the Soviets had sent troops to envelop their positions. Kolosjoki and particularly Breikofel were under attack late on 20 October. Generalleutnant Degen, at Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 137's command post, heard about the attack and at 1615hrs motored to Kolosjoki. At 1625hrs, firing was heard from III./GJR 137's positions and the telephone wire to them was unintentionally cut. According to divisional staff officer Oberstleutnant Hans Roschmann, had they realized what they had done, the Soviets 'could have given false and misleading orders and reports in both directions' (Brockelmann & Roschmann 1952: 132). I./GJR 137, two platoons of the anti-tank company and the regimental mortar platoon were alerted. The bicycle platoon was ordered to send a patrol down the road to find out what was happening. They departed at 1705hrs and at 1720hrs sent a message stating that 'A Russian unit, strength unknown, is at the Kolosjoki road, about 700 metres from the south eastern corner of Lake Kuotsijaervi'; the cyclists could not proceed down the road as it was 'under fire by machine guns and snipers. Am attempting to reconnoitre on the southern shores of Lake Kuotsijaervi' (quoted in Brockelmann & Roschmann 1952: 133).

The signals platoon then decoded a radio message, signed by Degen and reporting that his staff car had run into a Soviet ambush on his way to Kolosjoki. He narrowly escaped and once at Kolosjoki reported the 'Enemy there estimated to be at least one battalion with mortars'; he ordered the road cleared by tomorrow morning 'before reinforcements arrive' (quoted in Brockelmann & Roschmann 1952: 133). The regimental commander, Major Richard Grumm, thought the Soviets must have had 'orders to block the Kolosjoki road and thus prevent the retreat of German forces still near Kolosjoki. It is therefore unlikely that these elements are under battalion strength' (quoted in Brockelmann & Roschmann 1952: 133). Clearing the road was 'absolutely essential'; if not, AufklAbt 67's motor vehicles would be lost, as they could not cross the lake because there was insufficient bridging equipment. The nickel mines were no longer a worry for the Germans as they had already been destroyed.

Grumm had available I./GJR 137, two platoons from the anti-tank company, and the regimental bicycle and mortar platoons. He assessed that the Soviets did not have heavy artillery 'owing to the difficulties of the terrain over which

they approached' (quoted in Brockelmann & Roschmann 1952: 133), but the probable presence of Soviet heavy mortars made artillery support particularly important to the German attack. Despite the threat of a Soviet sweep further south that would place I./GJR 137 in danger, Grumm thought 'the regiment must concentrate all its forces for an attack along the Kolosjoki road' (quoted in Brockelmann & Roschmann 1952: 133). He decided to attack at dawn 'with main effort on the right, in order to destroy the enemy reported to be on either side of the Kolosjoki road' (quoted in Brockelmann & Roschmann 1952: 134). An artillery bombardment would precede the attack and the forces in Kolosjoki would attack south-west, making sure they avoided the artillery bombardment.

Roschmann approved the plan. He informed Grumm that because the Soviets were also attacking either side of the Arctic Ocean Highway, no further infantry support would be available. German air support was ruled out because of problems trying to distinguish the enemy from friendly forces. Roschmann also sent an anti-aircraft detachment of one 8.8cm gun to the regiment. Grumm thought that the Soviets could be reinforced during the night undetected by German reconnaissance patrols, and ordered I./GJR 137 to carry out patrols to look out for Soviet reinforcements or any more attempts to turn the German flank. The dangers of reconnaissance at night in a forest were well appreciated, but were thought to be worth accepting 'in view of the obscure situation, and in view of the extent of the enemy blocking position' (Brockelmann & Roschmann 1952: 135).

At 1945hrs, a message was sent to Degen about the attack the next morning: 'artillery fire to begin at 0800 ... 1st Battalion, 137th Regiment will attack on both sides of Kolosjoki road at 0830 hours; from 0915 on, 67th Reconnaissance Battalion and available units of the 3rd Battalion 137th Regiment will cooperate east of Kolosjoki road. Light signal of friendly troops two violet stars' (quoted in Brockelmann & Roschmann 1952: 137). There was no response. Grumm hoped Degen would presume that no night attack would occur and that the relief attack, when launched, would be preceded by a bombardment.

At 2200hrs, a German orders group was assembled. The heavy-artillery group commander would command all guns from 0800hrs to 0830hrs for the initial bombardment and then 'The four medium mortars of the regiment, the two mountain infantry guns of the 1st Battalion, 137th Regiment, and the light mortars ... will be assigned to the 1st Battalion for the beginning of the attack. An artillery liaison party will be attached to the staff of the 1st Battalion' (quoted in Brockelmann & Roschmann 1952: 140). The order stressed 'It is important to destroy the enemy forces before the arrival of reinforcements' (quoted in Brockelmann & Roschmann 1952: 141). The company commanders then discussed combat sectors, liaison, light signals and the issue of ammunition. Because they knew the terrain, 'personal reconnaissance by the commanders was not necessary' (Brockelmann & Roschmann 1952: 141). Detailed reconnaissance of the terrain could not have been conducted at night and if required in the morning would have delayed the attack.

That night a telephone call was received from supply troops of I./GJR 137 at Salmijärvi airfield, saying they were under attack and needed support, but when an officer was dispatched to investigate he found that only a Soviet platoon had tried to cross a river east of the airfield and was easily driven off. Also during the night, reconnaissance patrols from I./GJR 137 determined that the Soviets were dug in for all-round defence on the road, but that they



German artillery was particularly effective, causing most Soviet casualties. The divisional artillery commander was sent from division to regimental headquarters, and forward observers were detached to each company. The heavy field guns located near Salmijärvi were within range; here, one such gun is set up to fire in the northern Arctic. (Photo by Martin Sachse/ullstein bild via Getty Images)

were also in the vicinity of Spitzkofel. The Waldkofel and Felsberg garrisons, located near the Arctic Ocean Highway further north, were ordered to withdraw to the southern bank of the Kolos River. At 0815hrs a radio message from Waldkofel was deciphered, saying that two enemy companies had attacked and bypassed them and that they were 'withdrawing to the southeast as ordered' (quoted in Brockelmann & Roschmann 1952: 143).

At 0910hrs a German reconnaissance aircraft dropped a message at regimental headquarters stating that the enemy on the Kolosjoki road 'by the extent and nature of earth works, is estimated to be at least one battalion strong'; no reinforcements were seen approaching, a small fire probably from an ammunition dump was observed and there was 'Severe fighting around Breittkofel' (quoted in Brockelmann & Roschmann 1952: 145). 2. and 3./GJR 137 formed up either side of the road close to the Soviet positions and were attacked by bombs and machine-gun fire from Soviet aircraft. Neither did 'much harm to the German forces who took cover in the forest' (Brockelmann & Roschmann 1952: 143). Strong Soviet resistance was met when the attack started following the initial bombardment, and losses

were suffered from Russian snipers in trees and from the fire of heavy mortars, which was well-directed from advanced observers. The Russians were skilfully camouflaged and dug in, and could only be attacked with great difficulty. Nevertheless, the German artillery fire had destroyed a great number of their shelters and weapons and the companies slowly made progress, the rifle grenades, the antitank close support forces, and the artillery fire directed by advanced observers. (Brockelmann & Roschmann 1952: 143–44)

Roschmann was not present with the main attack; he had gone to Lake Kuotsijärvi to assist the bicycle platoon, which was hard-pressed in dense forest and marshy terrain.

By 0930hrs, with the support of the 8.8cm gun, the Soviets had been pushed back to a disused quarry near to the road close by Lake Kuotsijärvi. 1./GJR 137 was committed on the right flank. On the other flank, 2./AufklAbt 67 and the reinforced 12./GJR 137 went into action at 0945hrs. This force was





Contesting the quarry

The 3rd Battalion, 70th Naval Rifle Brigade marched for three days over the tundra to infiltrate German positions and sit astride the main road south-west of Nikel late on 20 October. III./GJR 137, with the divisional commander Generalleutnant Degen, was cut off and the following morning I./GJR 137 was committed to launching a counter-attack to rescue the battalion. Strong Soviet resistance was encountered, but by 0930hrs, with the support of an 8.8cm gun, the Germans pushed their opponents back to a disused quarry, which was 500m wide and extended east in a semi-circle to the road. The

Germans have deployed in woods on both sides of the road and advanced through low scrub and bushes that had occasional birch trees growing. They are being targeted by an SG-43 MMG and a 120mm mortar elevated to fire at close range whose crew are being directed by an observer looking over the top of the quarry's side. A sniper is aiming at the crew of the 8.8cm gun. An officer armed with a PPS-43 SMG is ordering forward men armed with PPSH-41 SMGs (the battalion had an SMG company that would prove effective when the Germans moved up to the quarry).

targeted by a Soviet mortar bombardment, as the Soviets expected them to attack at the same time as I./GJR 137. The mortars were not used much on I./GJR 137 as a result and the Germans slowly pressed forward through thick forest to the quarry. Pressed on both sides, the Soviet forces were soon encircled, and resistance ended by 1030hrs; 600 Soviet personnel were killed, the majority by artillery fire, and 250 surrendered, while 150 – separated from the main body and on patrols – escaped. The Germans lost 40 dead (nine from the anti-aircraft unit) and 50 wounded.

III./GJR 137, Aufklärungs-Abteilung 67 and all garrisons withdrew into positions prepared by I./GJR 137. Soviet naval riflemen entered Nikel at 0200hrs on 22 October and the 367th Rifle Division moved in from the north-east at 0500hrs. The largely uncommitted 83rd Rifle Division was due to exploit south-west down the road once the town was captured, but did not manage to do so before 163. Infanterie-Division, having defended the Arctic Ocean Highway further north, was able to retreat south via Salmijärvi. In the next few days 2. Gebirgs-Division and 163. Infanterie-Division moved south-west towards Nautsi. On 25 October, another attempt by the 127th Light Rifle Corps to interdict the German retreat at the Kaskawa hills failed due to poor coordination with the 83rd Rifle Division; the division pursued the Germans 150km to Ivalo, where they met up with Finnish troops on 5 November.

The operations of the Soviet naval rifle divisions in the light rifle corps were certainly ambitious. During October 1944, deep envelopments around the German right flank had twice threatened to block their retreat. On both occasions, naval rifle units managed to position themselves for effect, but were thrown off their objective and suffered severely. Roschmann certainly commended his adversaries: the fortifications built by the Soviets 'were admirable ... Camouflage against ground and air observation was excellent' (Brockelmann & Roschmann 1952: 151). Before the attack, the Soviet forces were 'able to withdraw eastwards by day', but the commander – despite being able to communicate with headquarters – 'remained faithful to his orders ... and not even the heaviest losses made them change their minds' (Brockelmann & Roschmann 1952: 151). Lack of artillery support and logistical support, and the toll the marches across the tundra took on the men, meant that too much was asked of the Soviet naval riflemen, especially in the face of determined and well-organized German counter-attacks that had an abundance of artillery support.

Analysis

The German campaign in the northern Arctic was fought for strategic reasons that reflected Hitler's emphasis upon economic considerations. Access to Finnish nickel-ore deposits was guaranteed for Germany, and bases to interdict Allied convoys to the Soviet Union were secured. An opportunity to have a decisive effect on the Murmansk Railway was lost, though, as insufficient attention was given to a plan to cut the line at Belomorsk, which could then have led on to a move on Arkhangelsk. This port was open nearly all year round, but was not considered in German planning. Furthermore, the failure to capture Leningrad in September 1941 hampered the Finnish armed forces for the rest of the war; if the city had fallen, the Finns might have supported the drive on Belomorsk.

The Germans are criticized by some historians for deploying specialist mountain troops to the region; however, they were ideally suited to cope with the weather and terrain extremes that were encountered. To fight effectively in the Arctic required the right type of soldier who had the proper training and equipment. Deployment to the Yugoslavian mountains perhaps would have made them more strategically effective, but in 1941 the threat there had yet to reach the proportions of later years. Once mountain troops were committed to Norway in 1940, a subsequent commitment to Lapland was logical, particularly if an offensive role was sought.

With respect to the Nikel Road, Roschmann thought that in October 1944, 'resolute action on the part of all commanders, bold aggressiveness on the part of the troops even in critical situations, and the ties of comradeship with the members of their own division encircled' (Brockelmann & Roschmann 1952: 150) won the day against an enemy superior in firepower who defended to the last. He cited training, the regional origin of the German personnel (except the officers), the mobility of mountain infantry, the high angle of mountain guns and the cooperation of artillery and anti-aircraft units as reasons for the victory; the lack of assault rifles, 120mm



ABOVE LEFT

Gebirgsjäger appreciate the northern Arctic terrain. (Author's Collection)



ABOVE RIGHT

Generalmajor (later Generalfeldmarschall) Ferdinand Schörner, divisional commander of 6. Gebirgs-Division until January 1942, called the war in the northern Arctic a war of junior officers. Tactically, the importance of their leadership – particularly at Hill 70 – is clear. Major Hans Ruef, battalion commander of III./GJR 143, suggested older officers were more cautious. Here is an *Obergefreiter* wearing an Infantry Assault Badge. (Nik Cornish at www.stavka.org.uk)

mortars, heavy mortars, air support and SMGs were disadvantages, however. Jodl also identified the importance of junior leaders when he assessed the performance of Grenadier-Brigade 503. He asserted that I./GrenBrig 503 and II./GrenBrig 503 were incapable of responding to the Soviet attack and showed no ability to manoeuvre on the battlefield. The battalions suffered heavily and had to be commanded by officers of 6. Gebirgs-Division, with many soldiers incorporated in the division's ranks. By comparison III./GrenBrig 503 was preserved, Jodl suggested, only by the personal qualities of its leaders, notably the *Gebirgsjäger* officer Major Georg Gebhard.

Operationally, decisive results in the Arctic were rare because of the difficulties in exploiting the terrain; movement was slow and as a consequence many tactical opportunities proved illusory. The vagaries of the climate could further limit opportunities, as the Soviets discovered in April and May 1942. The necessary preparations were not carried out properly as warm clothing was not provided. Because there were few trees, fires could not be started as the Soviet troops had no firewood with them. White smocks for camouflage purposes were not issued. Planks and poles to make bridges to cross streams were not available. Soviet commanders did not properly follow the guidance available to them as articulated in training manuals (for example, the 'Instruction on Conducting Marine Operations', dated 1940) and so the weather caused many casualties. The Soviet study on hydrography in the history of the Great Patriotic War did not mention this failure and the 12th Naval Infantry Brigade's landing was given no attention. Lessons were seemingly not officially learned. Poor reconnaissance and an inability to coordinate the actions of the separate Soviet battalions also hampered the attacking force.



Roads were all important and where they did not exist, the availability of engineer support and manpower to build them was an important force multiplier. With such unfavourable ground, control of the sea could be decisive and here the Northern Fleet, operating from nearby bases, gave the Soviets an advantage. Amphibious operations were off to a quick start. Early in the war, many Soviet tactical landings against enemy positions failed because apportioned forces were not strong enough to achieve the desired objective. Units were prepared in haste. Intelligence about Axis defences was fragmentary and incomplete. Special training was initially not conducted. Coordination was absent and sometimes fell apart following landing, with Soviet assault forces unsupported by naval guns or aviation. Communication between the assault force and supporting units could be unreliable. Support weapons were a rarity. Air cover was absent in many cases because command arrangements were not integrated. Providing they were of sufficient strength, however, in most cases – and especially in the northern Arctic in 1941 – these early operations did lead to the diversion of enemy forces from the main front.

By 1942, Soviet amphibious operations were more ambitious, but in April the ground forces allocated to break the German line on the Litsa River – and thereby give the amphibious landing by the 12th Naval Infantry Brigade on the flank a chance to be operationally decisive – were insufficient. The Soviets did not wait until the success or otherwise of their ground attack became clear, and as a result the naval infantry were exposed. In October 1944, Meretskov similarly did not want to wait and asked the Soviet High Command to start the naval infantry operations concurrently with the Army's offensive, but was vetoed. Moscow seemed wary and exerted more control on the amphibious operations of the Northern Fleet. Admiral V.I. Platonov, the head of the Northern Fleet's headquarters, gave another example. In his memoirs he stated that following the capture of Petsamo, a landing was planned on the northern shore of Varanger Fjord near Vadsö and Vardö in order to gain sea control of Varanger Bay; troops were loaded onto boats, but a message was received from the People's Commissar for the Navy in Moscow, Admiral N.G. Kuznetsov, cancelling the operation. The Russian historian Mikhail Suprun speculated that the expectation of heavy losses was the cause.

In February 1943 in the Kuban on the Black Sea, the Red Army commander decided to make an amphibious attack without waiting for the Army forces to break through on the land front. At the main landing site, the disembarkation was disorganized. Aerial and naval bombardments warned the defenders; the German batteries remained silent and concealed until the landing boats approached, and inflicted many losses on the main force. At Stanichki, down the coast, a smaller landing by Major Ts.L. Kunikov – supported by coastal artillery that was meant to be only diversionary – was successful, and reinforcements built up a viable beachhead. (Photo by TASS via Getty Images)



The historian M. Velichko claimed that the recruit for the naval reconnaissance detachment was 'an ardent patriot, mindful of the war, physically developed in all aspects, strong and clever' who was trained for 'single combat in the most difficult and unexpected situations' (quoted in Leonov 1993: 186). He needed to traverse broken terrain, steer a small boat, run along a gangplank, swim with weapons and rucksack, shoot and throw grenades following a long and intense march, withstand cold and hunger, and lie on freezing ground. (From the fonds of the RGAKFD in Krasnogorsk via Stavka)

Amphibious planners at the operational level showed a greater willingness to accept risks in order to maintain surprise and landings could be conducted by larger ships directly at ports to give the defenders less reaction time. The Kerch landings in the eastern Crimea in December 1941 included a landing from warships directly at the port of Feodosiya. Similarly, in September 1943, a landing was made directly at the port at Novorossiysk. To retain the element of surprise, a brief coastal-artillery bombardment was carried out, but no naval bombardment. Liinakhamari was another example of how this worked, and here, because of the small size of the bay, torpedo and patrol boats were essential to reduce the time spent at sea and give the defences less time to react.

By 1944, Soviet planning of amphibious assaults was meticulous and better informed by intelligence from ground and air reconnaissance, procedures for landing from warships with the support of aviation and ship artillery were worked out, and air and naval superiority over the landing area could be guaranteed. Attack aircraft were increasingly more important than bombers in directly supporting the troops ashore. Air support at Kerch and Eltigen in October 1943 was especially effective in repelling Axis counter-attacks. Soviet success without air support – for example, at Kerch in December 1941 – was achieved only when the weather or operational reasons prevented enemy aircraft from intervening. Later in the war, as illustrated by attacks made by fighter-bombers at Liinakhamari, air power became more important as German intelligence efforts and the increased strength of defences made achieving surprise increasingly difficult for the Soviets.

Aftermath

On 23 October 1944, the 3rd and 4th battalions of the 12th Naval Infantry Brigade and 176 men of the 125th Naval Infantry Regiment under Petersburgsky embarked at Liinakhamari and landed at Kobbholm Fjord in support of the advance on Kirkenes. They captured a hydroelectric power station intact and cleared the coast to Jar Fjord. By 24 October, with the protection of 4. Zerstörer-Flottille, the Germans evacuated Kirkenes relatively undisturbed. On 26 October, a Soviet destroyer flotilla was sent out on its only sortie to intercept German convoys, but was too late and carried out a desultory artillery duel with coastal batteries in Vardö. The larger battleship and cruiser available remained in port for the whole of October. Suprun suggests a verbal order was given to Golovko directing him not to risk the capital ships, as the loss or damage of major assets was politically undesirable.



During World War II, Soviet naval infantry – depicted here in the summer of 1941 – showed ‘An indomitable enthusiasm for the attack, and boldness in manoeuvre: impetuosity, selfless courage and great valour are the ingredients of the spirit of naval infantry’ (Kamalov 1966: 3). The Soviet military correspondent and author Leonid Sobolev described how the sailor had ‘the soul of the Bolshevik, the Komsomol member, a devoted son of the motherland’; he possessed ‘a blend of decisiveness, resourcefulness, tenacious valour and unshakeable steadfastness’ and was ‘irrepressible, persistent and purposeful’ (quoted in Kamalov 1966: 4). (Photo by TASS via Getty Images)



Generalleutnant Max-Josef Pemsel, the commanding officer of 6. Gebirgs-Division in October 1944, was awarded the Knight's Cross for his actions in the Petsamo campaign and in 1956 was made a *Generalmajor* in the Bundeswehr. Born in 1897 in Regensburg, Bavaria, he was a volunteer in World War I and made an officer in 1918. From 1935 he served in a variety of staff appointments within mountain formations (and also as chief-of-staff of 7. Armee in Normandy in June 1944) before being sent to Finland in August 1944. He retired as a *Generalleutnant* in 1961 and died in 1985. (Simon Orchard)

The main objective of the Soviet Navy – to interdict the evacuation by sea of German forces – was a failure. One-third of German equipment and supplies were successfully withdrawn, mostly from the Varanger Peninsula on over 100 ships. Kirkenes fell to Red Army forces on 25 October. While this was occurring, the 2nd and 3rd battalions of the 63rd Naval Infantry Brigade landed at Holmengrå Fjord. With winter approaching, once Kirkenes was captured there was little reason for the Soviets to continue their offensive.

In recognition of service, dozens of naval formations were awarded the names of the cities they liberated and the 13th, 66th, 71st, 75th and 154th Naval Rifle brigades and the 355th and 365th Naval Infantry battalions were recognized as Guards units. Others (ten brigades and six battalions) were made Red Banner units. The Order of the Red Banner was awarded to the 12th Naval Infantry Brigade (27 February 1943) and the 63rd Naval Infantry Brigade (3 November 1944). By February 1945, the 126th and 127th Light Rifle corps were redesignated 'mountain rifle corps' and fought in the mountains of

southern Poland. The 72nd Naval Rifle Brigade was then transferred to the Far East. Leonov and 40 men from the naval reconnaissance detachment also went there and participated in landings against Japanese-held Korean ports.

In November 1944, 2. Gebirgs-Division swung north-west into northern Norway and then transferred to the Western Front; in January 1945 the division was deployed to Alsace and, following its escape from the Colmar pocket, moved to the Saar, where in February it was committed to a counter-attack at Trier. Retreat into southern Germany followed and in May the formation finally surrendered to the Americans in the Tirol. 6. Gebirgs-Division had an easier time because it stayed in Norway for the rest of the war and surrendered to the British in May 1945.

The junior German officers had mixed fortunes. Major Raithel was promoted *Oberstleutnant* on 1 November 1943 and was advised by General der Gebirgstruppe Ferdinand Schörner to transfer to the Waffen-SS. He commanded a regiment of 13. Waffen-Gebirgs-Division der SS *Handschar* in Yugoslavia. In June 1944, as an *SS-Standartenführer*, he was appointed commander of 23. Waffen-Gebirgs-Division der SS *Kama*. In December he was made a regimental commander in 6. SS-Gebirgs-Division *Nord* on the Western Front in Alsace. He died in a car accident in 1990. Leutnant Dewitz was awarded the Knight's Cross for his role in storming Hill 70. In March 1943 he transferred to Infanterie-Division (mot.) *Großdeutschland*, serving as the commander of III. Bataillon/Füsilier-Regiment *Großdeutschland*, and died on the first day of the battle of Kursk, 5 July 1943. Major Gebhard was awarded the Knight's Cross for his actions as commander of III./GrenBrig 503 in October 1944. He was hailed in a Munich newspaper as the hero of Petsamo for leading the remnants of his unit in holding a bridgehead, despite heavy artillery fire, allowing others to withdraw. He was wounded in March 1945 but survived the war.

UNIT ORGANIZATIONS

Soviet

The naval infantry battalion had three rifle companies, each of 144 officers and men organized into three platoons, a mortar squad (one 50mm mortar), and a machine-gun section (two HMGs). Each platoon had four squads (each with two NCOs and ten men). There was also a machine-gun company (120 officers and men), organized into three platoons that each deployed four machine guns. The mortar company comprised four platoons, each with four 82mm mortars. There was an anti-tank platoon of two 45mm guns and, from 1942, an anti-tank-rifle company of 100 officers and men organized into three platoons and equipped with 18 anti-tank rifles. An artillery battery of four 76mm guns was initially attached to the battalion, but formed an artillery battalion of 12 guns at brigade level later in the war.

In 1942–43, the naval infantry brigade could also have a 120mm mortar battalion of 12 mortars, an anti-tank battalion of 12 45mm guns, and an SMG battalion of 640

men (three companies, each with 96 officers and men, with 90 SMGs, four anti-tank rifles and two LMGs, and a support company with 151 officers and men equipped with 118 SMGs, 20 rifles, two anti-tank rifles, ten LMGs, two HMGs and three 50mm mortars). A sapper battalion of two companies also replaced the single sapper company in the earlier brigade organization.

In the naval rifle battalion, the rifle companies did not have any HMGs or mortars, and the machine-gun company had 16 instead of 12 HMGs. There was also an anti-tank-rifle platoon with eight anti-tank rifles. At brigade, the artillery battalion had 12 76mm guns, the mortar battalion 16 82mm mortars and eight 120mm mortars, the anti-tank battalion 12 57mm guns; other assets included an anti-tank-rifle company, an SMG company, a reconnaissance company, a signals battalion, a sapper company, a lorry company and an anti-aircraft section of three 12.7mm HMGs.



Soviet naval infantry launch a counter-attack near Sevastopol in 1942. (Photo by: Sovfoto/UIG via Getty Images)

German

Kriegsstärkenachweisung (KStN; War Strength Assessment) 132d, dated 1 November 1941, detailed the composition of a *Gebirgs-Kompanie* and allocated each *Gruppe* ten men, equipped with an SMG, seven rifles, two pistols and an LMG. Each *Zug* had four *Gruppen*, a *Granatwerfertrupp* comprising a 5cm mortar crewed by five men, and a *Zugtrupp* and *Zugstaffel* comprising 15 men, ten horses to carry ammunition and two light carts. In total, a *Zug* had one officer, seven NCOs and 65 men, armed with five SMGs, 13 pistols, 47 rifles, four LMGs and a 5cm mortar. Each *Kompanie* had three *Züge*: a *Panzerabwehrbüschentrupp* with three anti-tank rifles crewed by ten men; a *Kompanietrupp* with one NCO and 12 men; a *Granatwerfergruppe* with three NCOs, 30 men, 13 horses, a light cart, 24 rifles, 11 pistols and two 8cm mortars; a *Gefechtsroß* with five NCOs, 30 men, six horses, three field kitchens, a motorcycle and two lorries, armed with 22 rifles and 13 pistols; a *GepackStroß* with one NCO, four men and two lorries; and sometimes, attached from the battalion, a *VerpflegungStroß* with an NCO, seven men, eight horses and four wagons.

KStN 143 specified that the *Stabs-Kompanie* had a *Nachrichten Staffel* and other support troops with four wagons and eight lorries. 5. *Kompanie* was the *schwere-Kompanie* with an *Infanteriegeschütz-Zug* and a *Pionier-Zug*, and 4. *Kompanie* the *Maschinengewehr-Kompanie*, with three *Züge*. KStN 144, dated 1 February 1941, stated that

a *Maschinengewehr-Zug*, commanded by a *Leutnant*, had four *Gruppen*, each with one NCO and six men equipped with a machine gun, four rifles and two pistols. There was also a supply *Gruppe* of nine men and eight horses to carry ammunition; a *Zugstaffel* of one NCO, six men and four horses; a *Zugtrupp* of two NCOs, ten men and four horses, equipped with five pistols and seven rifles; and a *Nachrichten-Gruppe* with a telephone and two radio *Staffeln*. KStN 145, dated 11 November 1941, stated that a *Pionier-Zug* comprised one officer, six NCOs, 65 men and 23 horses, equipped with 55 rifles, 13 pistols, five SMGs and four LMGs; it was divided into four *Gruppen* and a *Zugtrupp*. KStN 142, dated 11 November 1941, stated that an *Infanteriegeschütz-Zug* comprised one officer, 11 NCOs, 99 men and 37 horses, and was equipped with one SMG, 17 pistols, 93 rifles and two 7.5cm guns. There was also a *Nachrichten-Staffel* (with telephones) and munitions *Staffel*, as well as support services.

In October 1944, Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 137's battalions were poorly equipped; three *Gebirgs-Kompanien* each had three light mortars and nine LMGs; the *Maschinengewehr-Kompanie* had eight HMGs, and the *Stabs-Kompanie* a *Nachrichten-Zug*, *Pionier-Zug* and *Infanteriegeschütz-Zug*. There was a regimental *Granatwerfer-Zug* with four 8cm mortars. The *Panzerjäger-Kompanie* had four *Züge*, each of three *Gruppen* equipped with heavy anti-tank rifles and *Panzerschreck* rocket launchers. One was attached to III./GJR 137.



The *Gebirgs-Division* was smaller than the *Infanterie-Division* and had reduced support and transport units, but included 1,110 horse-drawn wagons, 4,000 mules and 1,500 horses. There were also 900 vehicles and 450 motorcycles. The greater number of mules and horses were particularly useful to transport equipment because there were few roads. Here, a German supply column is shown in the northern Arctic. (Photo by Martin Sachse/ullstein bild via Getty Images)

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Osprey Publishing
c/o Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
PO Box 883, Oxford, OX1 9PL, UK
Or
c/o Bloomsbury Publishing Inc.
1385 Broadway, 5th Floor, New York, NY 10018, USA
E-mail: info@ospreypublishing.com

www.ospreypublishing.com

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First published in Great Britain in 2018

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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: PB: 978 1 4728 1979 6
ePub: 978 1 4728 1981 9
ePDF: 978 1 4728 1980 2
XML: 978 1 4728 2332 8

Index by Rob Munro

Typeset in Univers, Sabon and Adobe Garamond Pro

Maps by bounford.com

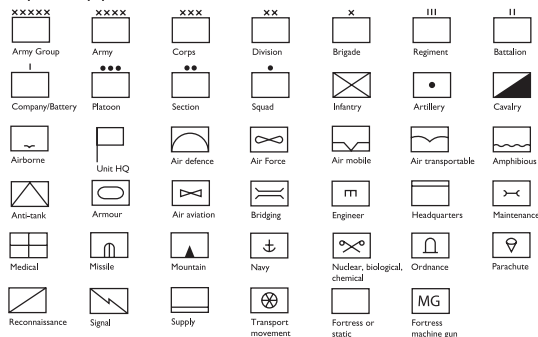
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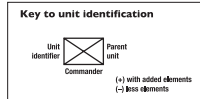
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Key to military symbols



Key to unit identification



Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Simon Orchard, who provided copies of all German primary sources used for my research, including daily operational reports, maps, award citations, orders of battle and lists of unit casualties. I would also like to thank David Campbell who gave me access to a profusion of secondary sources, and Colin Greentree who assisted with translations. Ethan Henderson, the rare books curator at Georgetown University, was most gracious in providing a translated copy of Kamalov's history of the Soviet naval infantry. Thanks also to Nik Cornish who provided assistance with researching images for the book.

Editor's note

German ranks and unit designations are given in German, while Soviet ranks and unit designations are in English. Subunits such as battalions and companies have abbreviated designations; these are defined below.

AufklAbt	<i>Aufklärungs-Abteilung</i> : reconnaissance battalion
GAR	<i>Gebirgs-Artillerie-Regiment</i> : mountain artillery regiment
GebFErsBtl	<i>Gebirgsjäger-Feldersatz-Bataillon</i> : mountain infantry field replacement battalion
GebPiBtl	<i>Gebirgs-Pionier-Bataillon</i> : mountain pioneer battalion
GebPzJgAbt	<i>Gebirgs-Panzerjäger-Abteilung</i> : mountain anti-tank battalion
gemFlaKAbt	<i>gemischte Flak-Abteilung</i> : mixed anti-aircraft battalion
GJR	<i>Gebirgsjäger-Regiment</i> : mountain infantry regiment
GrenBrig	<i>Grenadier-Brigade</i>
HKAA	<i>Heeres-Küsten-Artillerie-Abteilung</i> : Army coastal artillery battalion
NDR	Northern Defensive Region
RadfBtl	<i>Radfahr-Bataillon</i> : bicycle battalion

Table of ranks

German Army	British Army	Red Army (and naval infantry)
no equivalent	no equivalent	<i>Mārshal Sovetskogo Soýúza</i> (Marshal of the Soviet Union)
<i>Generalfeldmarschall</i>	Field Marshal	<i>General'ármii</i> (General of the Army)
<i>Generaloberst</i>	General	<i>General-Polkóvnik</i> (General-Colonel)
<i>General der Infanterie</i>	Lieutenant-General	no equivalent
<i>Generalleutnant</i>	Major-General	<i>General-Leytenant</i> (General-Lieutenant)
<i>Generalmajor</i>	Brigadier	<i>General-Mayór</i> (General-Major)
<i>Oberst</i>	Colonel	<i>Polkóvnik</i>
<i>Oberstleutnant</i>	Lieutenant-Colonel	<i>Podpolkóvnik</i>
<i>Major</i>	Major	<i>Mayór</i>
<i>Hauptmann</i>	Captain	<i>Kapitán</i>
<i>Oberleutnant</i>	Lieutenant	<i>Stárshiy Leytenant</i> (Senior Lieutenant)
<i>Leutnant</i>	Second Lieutenant	<i>Leytenant</i>
no equivalent	no equivalent	<i>Mládshiy Leytenant</i> (Junior Lieutenant)
<i>Hauptfeldwebel</i>	Warrant Officer I	<i>Starshiná</i>
<i>Oberfeldwebel</i>	Warrant Officer II	no equivalent
<i>Feldwebel</i>	Sergeant Major	no equivalent
<i>Unterfeldwebel</i>	Sergeant	<i>Stárshiy Serzhánt</i> (Senior Sergeant)
<i>Oberjäger</i>	Corporal	<i>Serzhánt</i> (Sergeant)
<i>Stabsgefreiter</i>	no equivalent	<i>Mládshiy Serzhánt</i> (Junior Sergeant)
<i>Obergefreiter</i>	no equivalent	no equivalent
<i>Gefreiter</i>	Lance Corporal	<i>Yefréytor</i> (Lance Corporal)
<i>Schütze</i>	Private	Private